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Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

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New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Masood Khan/Mr. Ahmad	(Pakistan)
<i>Members:</i>	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Ms. King
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Sharifov
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Shin Dong Ik
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . .	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in Mali

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal to participate in this meeting.

Under rule of 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule of 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Tête António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule of 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: The Council is convened today at a potential turning point in the crisis in Mali. The military struggle over northern Mali has been engaged. The Secretary-General has applauded France for its courageous decision to deploy forces to arrest the troubling push by extremist groups southward. He greatly appreciates the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the troop contributors to the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) to accelerate its deployment.

The Secretary-General has been clear in his instructions for the United Nations system to move with all speed to contribute, within the Organization's mandates and capabilities, to resolving the crisis in Mali within the framework of resolution 2085 (2012).

I am pleased to be joined here today by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Djinnit, who has been working tirelessly and cooperating closely

with national and regional actors to resolve the situation in Mali.

As we focus today on solutions in Mali, let us not forget that the factors behind the sudden collapse 10 months ago of one of West Africa's most vaunted democracies, and the takeover of half of the country by extremists, run deep. Solutions will not likely come quickly or simply. Dangers line the path ahead. Whether the international community is successful in helping Mali to restore its democracy and recapture its territory in a lasting way will depend on the breadth of its vision and the comprehensiveness of its response. Vigorous military actions must be matched by an equally strong focus on the political challenges in Mali. They must be carried out with full attention to human rights and humanitarian concerns, and they should be reinforced by strategies to address the many transnational threats that combine to breed extremism and weaken governance not just in Mali but across the Sahel.

As the members of the Council are aware, the dynamics in northern Mali have shifted dramatically in recent days. The fall of Konna on 10 January, as part of an apparent attempt by extremists to push southward towards Bamako, had the effect of galvanizing the concerns of Mali and its friends and accelerating the regional and international response to the crisis.

The capabilities of the armed groups occupying northern Mali have proven to be strong, as they are better equipped and trained than initially anticipated. This was illustrated on 14 January, when radical forces opened a new front in Diabaly, only 350 kilometres from Bamako. The extremist armed groups' advance into eastern Mali was successfully repelled and the fighters have reportedly fled these areas. Yet it appears that in the western area, armed elements have moved closer to the Mauritanian border. Meanwhile, the latest reports indicate that the cities of Konna and Diabaly are now under control of the Malian army.

Military sources in Bamako have indicated that in deciding to resume hostilities, the extremists intended to capture Bamako and that the risk of infiltration and further attacks by these groups on southern towns, including Bamako, remains high.

With regard to developments in the subregion related to Mali, on 20 January Nigerian troops on the way to Mali were attacked in northern Nigeria by Boko Haram, and three soldiers were killed. Member

States with access to intelligence and other reports not available to us may have additional information about the situation in Mali and the region, and we would welcome any information that can be shared with us.

On 19 January, ECOWAS held an extraordinary summit in Abidjan to review the latest developments in Mali, particularly the modalities for an accelerated deployment of African forces. The summit endorsed the appointment of AFISMA's military command, called on all troop-contributing countries to make their contingents immediately available, and authorized AFISMA contingents to engage in operations with their units. The summit called upon the United Nations to immediately furnish the logistical and financial support for the deployment of AFISMA. The summit also called on the Government of Mali, the AU and ECOWAS to establish a functional mission headquarters for AFISMA in order to facilitate coordination and deployment, and to establish a joint coordination mechanism on resolution 2085 (2012) to facilitate regular consultations on political leadership, resource mobilization and disbursement, as well as reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

The deployment of AFISMA troops and headquarters staff officers began on 18 January. As of 20 January, 855 troops from Benin, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo had been deployed, along with a full Nigerien battalion at the border with Mali. There is general agreement amongst key stakeholders in Bamako that the envisaged AFISMA strength of 3,300 personnel needs to be increased if AFISMA is to engage effectively in offensive operations and enhance force protection.

The deployment of the Force Commander and establishment of the force headquarters have set the conditions for the planning effort, supported by planners provided by international partners. The planning process also provides an opportunity to review and revise, as necessary, the AFISMA troop requirements, command and control structures, liaison mechanisms and other important matters.

On 21 January, the President of the ECOWAS Commission and the Chair of the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff visited Bamako. They met with the AFISMA Force Commander and other officers, and visited AFISMA troops already on the ground, as well as the French forces. They also met senior Chadian officers to discuss the deployment of the 2,000-strong Chadian troops and their coordination with AFISMA.

Due to the accelerated deployment of AFISMA troops, critical equipment, logistical and other support for the troops are urgently required. In accordance with paragraph 11 of resolution 2085 (2012), the United Nations is supporting AFISMA headquarters in planning activities, including assessing the units' equipment and operational readiness. AFISMA is currently facing critical gaps, including communications capacity, air mobility and medical capabilities. Additionally, it is expected that the deployed contingents will have only very limited capacities for self-sustainment. The Malian defence and security forces also have capacity gaps requiring immediate attention.

The African Union and ECOWAS are finalizing a comprehensive list of priority requirements, while the Malian Minister of Defence has indicated that a comprehensive list of the needs of the Malian Defence And Security Forces has been submitted to Interim President Traoré. These will inform the donors' conference that the African Union has called to take place in Addis Ababa on 29 January.

In a welcome development, on 17 January the European Union established a Common Security and Defence Policy mission, headed by Brigadier General François Lecointre of France, that is expected to be on the ground by mid-February to support the training and reorganization of the Malian Armed Forces. The mission will not be involved in combat operations.

As noted in his letter to the Security Council, the Secretary-General is firmly committed to using the tools of the United Nations, as authorized by the Security Council, to help to address the crisis in Mali and to promote the implementation of resolution 2085 (2012). His letter outlines several options for the Security Council's consideration, and he also identifies several concerns regarding capacity, human rights and the safety and security of United Nations personnel and facilities. The Secretary-General is confident that, in exercising its responsibility to debate, and perhaps authorize, the use of United Nations assets, Security Council members will consider carefully both his proposals and his concerns. The options proposed in his letter are as follows.

One option would be for all logistics support to AFISMA to be provided through bilateral channels. That option could be funded through one or a combination of bilateral, United Nations trust fund or United Nations assessed contributions channels.

A second option would be for the United Nations to provide a logistics support package to AFISMA in all phases of its operations. Given that a finalized concept of operations for AFISMA is under development, it is currently not possible to produce a detailed plan for such a support package. Nonetheless, at the request of the Council, the Secretariat has conducted additional planning for a logistics support package. The elements of a possible United Nations support package to AFISMA are contained in the annex to the letter that the Secretary-General submitted. This option would be financed through United Nations assessed contributions.

A third option would be for bilateral partners to provide logistics support to AFISMA during the combat phase of operations, and for the United Nations to provide support to it during the deployment and in the stabilization phases of its operations. This option would significantly reduce some of the risks to the Organization and personnel who are associated with the second option.

Meanwhile, the start-up team for the establishment of the United Nations multidisciplinary presence in Mali arrived in Bamako over the weekend and renewed contacts with stakeholders to continue discussions on the implementation of all aspects of resolution 2085 (2012), including the political and the security processes. The head of the United Nations team in Bamako, Mr. João Honwana, is already on the ground and has begun discussions on a transitional road map, including regarding reconciliation, with Malian partners.

In his meetings with Malian authorities, he emphasized the need for the political and military tracks to go together, as well as the need for a clear vision on the part of Malian authorities on what needs to be done, around which international support can be rallied to move the transitional process forward. He also raised the need for raising awareness of the risks of ethnic tensions and retaliation taking place in Mali. In that regard, I note again that the multidisciplinary office includes human rights expertise.

The Malian Government has expressed its full agreement on the need for the military and political processes to evolve jointly, and informed the United Nations team that it was moving swiftly with an inclusive consultation exercise with key civil and political actors on the transitional road map, prior to its submission for approval to the National Assembly within two or three weeks. The Malian Government

also reiterated its desire for a discrete and light United Nations presence in Bamako, with interlocutors with whom they could frankly exchange views and rely on for advice. The authorities also noted that Mali needed a broader reconciliation process, which could be carried out only once basic State authority and control had been re-established in the north. On elections — an essential element of the political process — Malian officials were of the view that elections would have to take place once critical northern positions had been brought back under Government control.

Special Representative of the Secretary-General Djinnit has also continued to engage national and regional actors to shore up support for the implementation of resolution 2085 (2012). On 17 January, he met with President Dioncounda Traoré in Bamako and highlighted the importance of the political process. On 18 January, he attended the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council meeting in Abidjan, and on 19 January Mr. Djinnit participated in the ECOWAS Summit of Heads of State. He provided clarification on the United Nations role in support to the immediate deployment of AFISMA, following a request from the President of ECOWAS Commission to the Secretary-General dated 17 January.

There is serious concern about the well-being of the population in the north of the country, where malnutrition rates were already reaching emergency thresholds before the resumption of the conflict. The insecurity has forced many humanitarian actors to reduce an already limited presence, or in some cases evacuate the area. The few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) still active in the north of Mali point to the region's growing isolation, with the main supply roads from the south and Algeria now cut off. The isolation is increasingly exacerbating the existing shortage of food and other commodities, with fuel shortages already having an impact on the functioning of hospitals and urban water-supply systems.

Despite the challenging environment, the United Nations and its partners are working to address the most pressing needs. Food distribution by the World Food Programme of the United Nations (WFP) is ongoing for 12,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bamako. UNICEF is currently working with NGO partners to provide and distribute aquatabs in Gao after the Movement for Unity and Jihad in Western Africa seized the fuel used for the water distribution network. The WFP is also preparing to deliver food to

the three northern regions of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, to be implemented as soon as possible, as well as the provision of food assistance to 22,000 IDPs and 32,000 IDPs in the Mopti and Ségou regions, respectively.

There are also mounting protection concerns, with reports of retribution attacks against civilian Tuareg and Arab populations and continued allegations of the recruitment of child soldiers and the use of sexual violence as a tool of war. Meanwhile, on 16 January, the International Criminal Court announced that it was opening an investigation into alleged war crimes committed on the territory of Mali since January 2012.

The situation underscores the need to ensure that parties to the conflict avoid harming civilians and comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights norms, including facilitating the rapid and unimpeded passage of relief consignments, equipment and personnel. In that regard, the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy applies to any United Nations support to the military operation undertaken. The policy establishes a set of principles for United Nations entities contemplating or involved in providing support to non-United Nations security forces. Key elements include an assessment of risk, transparency with receiving entities and an effective implementation framework.

For 10 months now, the world has watched with horror as the people of northern Mali have been subjected to almost unspeakable brutality at the hands of armed extremists and terrorists. Friends of the Malian people in the region and beyond were shocked by the abrupt collapse of constitutional order in Mali and the threat to Mali's territorial integrity and unity, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. The Council, along with regional and subregional organizations, debated how best to assist the people of Mali to address the full spectrum of the severe political, security, humanitarian, and human rights challenges that they faced. As we have discussed before, the problems of Mali also need to be seen in the context of the broader Sahel region, as we cannot expect to alleviate the crisis in the Sahel without simultaneously improving the situation in Mali, which can spill over, and has in fact done so, into neighbouring countries.

In recent weeks, African and international leaders, including the members of the Council, have by their actions demonstrated their resolve to assist the people and institutions of Mali. We welcome the clear, unified message that we have heard from Council members

and beyond that the military and political tracks must proceed hand in hand, with full attention paid to the humanitarian situation and to human rights.

We fully concur that ongoing military operations should take place within the framework of a political process to ensure sustainable peace, stability, and national reconciliation. Likewise, the ongoing military operations should provide the necessary political space for negotiations between the Government and groups that have renounced violence and distanced themselves from terrorist networks. The United Nations will continue to impress upon the Malian leaders the need to agree quickly on a transitional road map to restore effectively constitutional order. We urge others to reinforce that message, for reliance on an exclusively military approach will not allow for the building of a lasting solution for Mali.

The Secretary-General and other senior officials will be in Addis Ababa over the weekend for the AU Summit. The Summit will provide additional opportunities for discussions between United Nations officials and our African and international partners on how collectively we can help the Malian people.

The President: I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Daou (Mali) (spoke in French): Mr. President, the delegation of Mali is delighted to see you preside over the work of the Council in the month of January and wishes you every success in fulfilling your mandate. We would like to pay warm tribute to your great country, Pakistan, and its invaluable contribution to the strengthening of international peace and security.

I take this opportunity also to thank all of the members of the Security Council for their solidarity and their commitment, shoulder to shoulder with the people and the Government of Mali, during this difficult time.

On 20 January 2012, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2085 (2012), authorizing, under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the deployment in Mali of an African-led international support mission for Mali (AFISMA) so as to assist the Malian Defence and Security Forces to liberate the northern part of the national territory, which is controlled by armed extremist and terrorist groups — the Movement for Unity and Jihad in Western Africa, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar Dine and their allies.

At that time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali reiterated the commitment of the Government of Mali to fully cooperate with the Security Council and to abide by its obligations under the resolution, including the holding, through the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) facilitator, of talks with the Malian rebel groups aimed at inducing them to cut all ties with the terrorists and to recognize the integrity and sovereignty of the national territory as well as the republican and secular character of the State of Mali.

Flouting the spirit and the letter of resolution 2085 (2012), international law, the rule of law and fundamental human rights, terrorist and extremist groups, as well as irredentist movements and criminal networks, continue to defy the international community. The interim President of Mali, Mr. Dioncounda Traoré, in his speech to the nation on 12 January last, rightly noted that

“those who are occupying Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal and who are inflicting such terrible suffering on the local population have turned a deaf ear to our request for dialogue. They want to extend their criminal activities throughout our entire country. They have proved this by attacking the positions held by our Defence and Security Forces in Kona, in the Mopti region”.

The highest Malian authorities have tirelessly advocated a political solution and deployed unflagging efforts to achieve lasting peace. Unfortunately, driven by hatred and obscurantism, jihadist extremists and criminals of all stripes have opted for armed aggression, the taking of further territories, a scorched-earth policy and subjugation so as to fulfil their sorry objectives.

Given that critical situation, the interim President of the Republic issued an appeal for general mobilization and imposed a state of emergency throughout the country. In addition, as supreme leader of the armed forces and in consultation with ECOWAS, he requested and obtained, in the framework of international law, the military support of France to halt the advance of the terrorists, who threaten not only Mali but also other countries of the Sahelo-Saharan region.

May I, on behalf of the Government of Mali, pay warm tribute to France, its people and its President, Mr. François Hollande, who, taking stock of the threat posed by the southward march of the terrorist groups,

immediately granted the Malian President's request, thereby making it possible to save Mali as a State and to restore hope to the people and the army of Mali.

Today Malian political circles, civil society, community and religious leaders, as well as young people, all aware of the gravity of the situation and determined to make even the ultimate sacrifice to defend their homeland, have joined in single-hearted unity around the President and the institutions of the Republic, so as to support the Malian army in the combat against terrorists, rebel forces and drug traffickers.

Even as the Security Council is meeting, the fighting continues on various fronts. Together, the Malian army and French troops are continuing to advance.

The sacrifice of the Vietnamese helicopter pilot, Damien Boiteux, who perished on the field of honour on the first day of the French offensive against the rebels in the area of Konna, was not in vain. Mali pays tribute to the memory of that brave combatant and all the martyrs of the Malian army who have shed their blood so that the worthy values of human dignity, freedom and human rights may prevail. Our thoughts also go out to the oppressed peoples in the north, the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and the refugees in neighbouring countries. The time has come to liberate Mali's northern region. The towns of Konna, Djabali and Douentza have been retaken and are now fully under the control of the Malian army, supported by French forces.

While we commend the Council on its unanimous commitment to and its support for France's action in Mali, on behalf of my country's Government, I would like to make a solemn appeal to the international community, all friendly countries and all partners to help to mobilize the financial resources necessary for the prompt deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali.

As Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, has just said, an extraordinary meeting of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, which also included several countries and organizations, took place on 19 January in Abidjan to consider the deployment of AFISMA. My colleague Ambassador Youssoufou Bamba, Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire and on behalf of the Chairman of ECOWAS, will inform the Council about the summit shortly and will report its conclusions.

Meanwhile, for my part, I would like to express the warm gratitude of the people and Government of Mali to ECOWAS and to commend the promptness with which the countries members of that organization, as well as Chad, offered their troops for early deployment in Mali. All those countries have already dispatched advance groups to prepare for the deployment of their contingents in the coming days.

With regard to the swift deployment of AFISMA, given all the difficulties faced by troop-contributing countries, I would once again like to underscore the urgency of providing international logistical support to AFISMA. In that respect, I am pleased to relay to the Council the request made to the United Nations by the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS to immediately provide the necessary logistical and financial support for AFISMA's deployment. I would also like to call on the whole international community to participate in the donors conference on the mobilization of financial, logistical and material resources for AFISMA's deployment. That general mobilization on 29 January in Addis Ababa, which we very much hope will include the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, will once again show that what is at stake today in Mali is nothing less than the defence of freedom and democracy.

We are certain that military intervention in Mali to combat the terrorist and rebel groups will promote the political process leading to normalization. I am pleased to recall that the Government of Mali is actively working to simultaneously achieve the transition's two major goals, namely, the restoration of our territorial integrity and the organization of free, transparent and credible elections, in order to bring the transition to an end and to provide the country with legitimate institutions, consistent with the spirit of resolution 2085 (2012).

In that regard, a meeting between the Government of Mali and its technical and financial partners was held yesterday, 21 January, to consider the recommendations and conclusions of the United Nations multidisciplinary assessment mission on Mali's electoral needs, which visited the country from 19 to 30 November 2012.

In conclusion, I would like to convey the gratitude of the Malian authorities to ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, our bilateral and multilateral partners, neighbouring countries and all countries of the region for their unwavering support during this difficult time that my country is experiencing.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tété António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

Mr. António: Allow me to start by congratulating your country, Mr. President, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January on the threshold of a new year. I also wish to convey to you and, through you, to the wider membership of the Council, the gratitude of the African Union Commission for this opportunity to contribute to this important and timely briefing on the situation in Mali. We are confident that our discussions today will give a strong impetus to the high-level engagements to be held on the margins of the African Union (AU) Summit, including the donors conference scheduled for 29 January.

(spoke in French)

Before dealing with the situation in Mali, allow me to undertake the painful duty of offering my condolences to the Algerian Government and people and to all Governments and peoples whose citizens were victims of the barbarous act committed by terrorists during the hostage-taking in Amenas. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission has condemned that odious act in the strongest terms in a communiqué issued in Addis Ababa.

(spoke in English)

Turning to the situation in Mali, following the adoption of resolution 2085 (2012), on 20 December 2012, the efforts of the African Union Commission have focused on helping to create the necessary political conditions, both internally in Mali and within the region, for the effective implementation of that resolution, in close consultation and coordination with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Malian authorities and the United Nations, as agreed in the Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crisis in Mali.

The renewed attacks by armed terrorist and criminal groups in northern Mali earlier this month, resulting in the capture of Konna and the subsequent advance towards Sevare, was a clear manifestation of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in northern Mali. Those attacks not only had far-reaching implications for the territorial integrity of Mali and the countries of the region but also were a potential security threat to Africa and the world as a whole.

Such developments underscored the urgency of accelerating the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), authorized by the Council through resolution 2085 (2012). That new situation reinforces the recommendation made in the report of the Secretary-General (see S/2012/894) that both the international support mission in Mali and the Malian forces would need the requisite capacities to carry out operations against terrorist and affiliated groups in northern Mali. That will require the timely and well-coordinated provision of a significant amount of support by international partners, including general and specialized equipment, logistics and funding. We have therefore keenly taken note of the information provided by the Secretary-General during his briefing this morning regarding his letter transmitted to the Security Council, as requested in resolution 2085 (2012), containing options for a voluntary and United Nations-funded logistics support package to the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). We look forward to the Council's reaction, taking into account Africa's concerns as outlined by Mr. Feltman, whom we thank for his very detailed briefing.

For its part, the African Union, through the Chairperson of the Commission, Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, strongly condemned the renewed attacks by armed terrorist and criminal groups in northern Mali and called upon all African Union member States to extend the necessary logistical, financial and capacity-building support to the Malian defence and security forces in line with relevant decisions of the AU Peace and Security Council and United Nations Security Council resolutions.

We wish to thank the African Union member States that have so far pledged troops to AFISMA and those contemplating doing so, as well as other partners for providing logistical and financial support. In its press statement issued on 14 January, the African Union Peace and Security Council acknowledged the assistance provided by France at the request of the Malian authorities and within the framework of Security Council resolution 2085 (2013).

The Commission of the African Union and ECOWAS held a coordination meeting in Addis Ababa on 16 January as part of their efforts to speed up the deployment of AFISMA and help Mali to re-establish its national unity and territorial integrity and facilitate the effective restoration of constitutional order in the country. The discussions focused on the following areas:

modalities for expediting the effective implementation of Security Council resolution 2085 (2012); command and control issues pertaining to AFISMA, including how best to expeditiously operationalize and enhance the command and control of the Mission based on the ECOWAS/AU-harmonized concept of operations and best practices from recent AU-led operations; and force generation and funding.

The meeting agreed to set up a Mali integrated task force at the AU headquarters made up of experts from the AU, ECOWAS and the United Nations, including representatives of other international stakeholders, to provide strategic guidance and advice for AFISMA. The meeting also agreed to source additional troop contributions to AFISMA from other AU member States.

The meeting also agreed to hold a donors conference on 29 January, as decided by the AU Peace and Security Council in its communiqué of 13 November 2012 and endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2085 (2012) following the AU Summit in Addis Ababa. The Conference is expected to mobilize resources and other necessary support for the Malian defence and security forces, as well as for AFISMA. The Chairperson of the AU Commission and the President of ECOWAS Commission will meet on the margins of the AU Summit to further consider issues relating to the deployment of AFISMA and the implementation of other aspects of resolution 2085 (2012).

Allow me to conclude by reiterating the commitment made by both the African Union and ECOWAS in their coordination meeting to spare no effort to expeditiously deploy and operationalize AFISMA, as well as to provide the requisite support, in consultation with the United Nations and other partners, to the process aiming at the full restoration of constitutional order in Mali. The concrete measures taken by the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS during the Summit held on 19 January in Abidjan provide a prompt response to the urgency of the current situation in Mali.

We also wish to reaffirm the AU's full solidarity with Mali, as well as our full support to the transitional authorities of Mali, namely, interim President Dioncounda Traoré and his Prime Minister Diango Cissoko.

Finally, we wish to appeal to all partners to actively participate in the forthcoming donors conference to be held in Addis Ababa and to contribute generously

to the proposed trust fund. We also wish to take this opportunity to reiterate the appeal of the African Union that efforts to secure funding through United Nations-assessed contributions should continue and be expedited.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Bamba (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 15 member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

At the outset, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman for his very informative briefing on the current situation in Mali. I would also like to thank Ambassador Oumar Daou, Permanent Representative of Mali, for his statement, as well as Ambassador Tête António, Permanent Observer of the African Union, for his intervention, which ECOWAS fully supports.

Before taking up what Ambassador Tête António has just said, I would like, on behalf of the 15 ECOWAS member States, to pay tribute to the victims of the tragic events that took place at the in Amenas gas plant in Algeria. The events claimed victims of several nationalities. In the light of these events, the whole world is once again reminded of the brutality and barbarism constantly displayed by terrorists.

Those tragic events confirm, as if there were any further need, that terrorism is a global threat, to effectively counter which will call for strengthened international solidarity. The intervention of French troops, at the request of the legal authorities of Mali, to assist the Malian armed forces in beating back the offensive by terrorist groups underscores the urgent need for such international solidarity.

That was, moreover, the core of the message delivered by President Alassane Ouattara, Chairman of ECOWAS, at the extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government held on 19 January in Abidjan, when he said "The time has come for a broader commitment ... to show greater solidarity with France and Africa".

It is fitting to express our sincere gratitude to France for its leadership in handling the crisis in Mali and to the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Russia, Spain and many other countries

for the various forms of support they are providing in the ongoing operations in Mali. We welcome the substantial involvement of the European Union as well, which confirmed at the end of the 17 January meeting its commitment to providing training for the Malian armed forces. In the same vein, we would like to thank the neighbouring countries in the Sahel and Maghreb regions for their frank cooperation in this process. We call on them to cooperate further to improve security across the entire region.

The extraordinary ECOWAS summit took important decisions in the context of resolution 2085 (2012). Those decisions relate to the specific and immediate methods for a stepped-up deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), given the deterioration of the security situation in Mali and the neighbouring countries. In that regard, as Mr. Feltman said, the appointments of Major General Shehu Usman Abdulkadir of Nigeria and Brigadier General Yaye Garba of the Niger, as the Force Commander and Deputy Commander of AFISMA, respectively, have been approved.

The establishment of a joint coordination mechanism for implementing resolution 2085 (2012) by the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS was decided for the purpose of facilitating regular consultations on political leadership, resource mobilization and accountability, as well as the monitoring and assessment of expenditures. It was also decided that logistical supplies and financial support would be requested of the United Nations for the deployment of AFISMA, pending the Council's decision on the logistical support called for in resolution 2085 (2012) and given the evolution of the events on the ground in Mali, which has required the accelerated deployment of AFISMA. The President of the ECOWAS Commission was also instructed to take, in close collaboration with the African Union, all the necessary steps for the holding of the donors conference scheduled for 29 January in order to mobilize financial, logistical and material resources for the deployment of AFISMA.

With regard to force generation, I would like to say that the following ECOWAS countries have pledged troops — Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. A number of other African countries, although not members of ECOWAS, also pledged troops or other forms of support, thereby showing the great solidarity of the African continent

on this matter. Among others, those countries include Burundi, Chad, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania.

From a practical point of view, I would like to inform the Council that, on the orders of President Alassane Ouattara, a mission led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire went to Bamako yesterday in order to support and encourage the ECOWAS troops deployed in AFISMA. The delegation also visited French troops, held a working meeting with the AFISMA command and met the troops already there, namely, troops from Benin, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. Given all the announcements that were made, the total number of AFISMA personnel, which was projected to be 3,300, could be doubled. Up to now, however, only 946 have been deployed.

The visit on the ground brought up three major difficulties, as Mr. Feltman indicated. First, the AFISMA budget has not yet been established, given that contributions are not yet available. Secondly, the AFISMA Force Commander does not have the resources needed for its smooth operation. Thirdly, AFISMA does not have the logistics support it needs to deploy outside Bamako, while AFISMA troops should be rapidly deployed to reinforce Malian and French troops in places liberated from the terrorists.

Given the gravity of the situation in Mali and the subregion, ECOWAS therefore calls the attention of the Security Council to the vital need of making the emergency logistical and financial support package available as requested by the ECOWAS Commission President in his correspondence dated 18 January, which was passed on to the Secretary-General and the Council as an official document.

Motivated by the urgent needs that have arisen in the theatre of operations in Mali, the African Union and ECOWAS, as stated in the press release of the African Union dated 11 January, renewed their request to the Council that it authorize emergency financing through United Nations contributions in order to allow for the swift deployment of AFISMA and the effective conduct of operations. For its part, ECOWAS is taking internal measures to make its contribution in order to deal with the situation.

Furthermore, ECOWAS calls on the goodwill of all people to play an active role and to make commitments to contribute during the donors conference scheduled for 29 January in Addis Ababa, in order to mobilize the financial, logistical and material resources that

are essential to accelerating an effective and efficient deployment of AFISMA. On behalf of the Chairman of ECOWAS, I would like to renew the appeal launched to the Secretary-General for him to continue to be personally involved with a view towards making the logistical and financial support package available to AFISMA on an emergency basis. ECOWAS would therefore like the Secretary-General to be able personally to attend and co-chair the donors conference, given the stakes of that meeting for the entire African continent. In that regard, we are convinced that the effective presence of the Secretary-General at that important donors conference would not only ensure its visibility but it would above all ensure its success.

In conclusion, as was emphasized by President Ouattara at the summit held last week in Abidjan, the military intervention and the current course of events were imposed upon us just as all of the efforts of ECOWAS and the African Union were focused on a political resolution among the Malian parties as part of the discussions of Ouagadougou and Algiers and in the context of resolution 2085 (2012).

ECOWAS therefore would strongly remind the transitional Malian authorities of the need to comply with resolution 2085 (2012), the relevant decisions of ECOWAS and those of the African Union as it develops the transitional road map that will permit the holding of the presidential election within the timetables given, with the support of the international community. In the light of that, ECOWAS would like to reiterate that the Tuareg issue and the question of the north of Mali cannot be hijacked by terrorist forces. All mingling between Tuareg and narco-terrorists must be avoided, and the settlement of the underlying causes of the conflict must be approached with pragmatism. The Government of Mali must therefore establish, in collaboration with ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations and all partners, the conditions for a genuine national dialogue with all components of the nation, including the representatives of the communities of northern Mali.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Senegal.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal) (spoke in French): First of all, let me commend you, Sir, for holding today's Security Council briefing on the tragic situation that the people of Mali are going through. We would also like to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his very useful briefing. We

also wish to thank the Permanent Representative of Mali, Ambassador Oumar Daou, for the additional information that he was kind enough to bring to the attention of this body.

My delegation fully endorses the statement that was just made on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) by Ambassador Youssoufou Bamba, Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mali is the victim of aggression accompanied by serious and unacceptable violence against its people. That fraternal country, which no doubt is enduring one of the darkest periods in its otherwise storied history, will suffer forever the destruction of a portion of its cultural and religious heritage at the hands of obscurantist gangs. That cynical enterprise, under the devious, covert guise of religion, poses a serious threat to the peace and security of the entire West African region and, beyond that, of the entire world.

In order to grasp the reprehensible nature and scale of the plot taking shape in the region, I would call on each Member of the Organization, in particularly of this body, to pay heed to the number of Islamist groups involved in the war in Mali. Close to 10 groups are wreaking havoc with full impunity in that area, as they seek to turn Mali into a hub for narco-terrorism and every kind of smuggling in Africa and beyond.

It is in that light that we should understand and welcome the rapid intervention by one of Mali's historic allies — France — upon that country's request and with the support of countries of the subregion, to halt and neutralize the jihadists' offensive against the large urban centres of the country. While the French intervention has already allowed the Malian army to retake the towns of Konna and Diabaly, the deployment of African troops, which was confirmed during the recent ECOWAS summit, will decidedly contribute to stepping up the pace of operations for retaking northern Mali.

I would like here to welcome the decision taken by Chad, a brotherly country that, although it is not a member of ECOWAS, wanted to share this heavy burden by deploying a large contingent. That is irrefutable proof of the growing international solidarity being shown in support of this crusade against international terrorism.

For its part, ECOWAS has already deployed hundreds of enabling elements, to be joined by others

to complete the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), which is predicted to reach a strength of over 5,000 troops.

In order to remain true to its ideals of regional solidarity, and given its historic, cultural and political ties with Mali, Senegal will deploy a contingent of 500 troops, made up of a command element, an artillery battery, an engineering company, a company for command, support and services, and a motorized company. In addition, as part of its participation in AFISMA, Senegal will fill nine command posts, seven of whom are already in Bamako. An initial group of enablers was sent out to the field on 20 January in order to prepare for the arrival of the rest of the contingent.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Mali, the Security Council has exhibited commendable willingness to find appropriate solutions to the crisis, as evidenced by its many statements and resolutions on the matter, the most recent of which is resolution 2085 (2012), of 20 December 2012, which authorized the deployment of a military force under African command. My country welcomes the positive attitude of all Council members in dealing with the risks of the terrorist threat.

I would like to take the opportunity provided by this briefing to call on all peace-loving countries, which have been dedicated to curbing the terrorist threat for some time now, to support, finance and arm the African troops engaged in that theatre of operations. In that regard, the donors conference for Mali scheduled to be held on 29 January in Addis Ababa will certainly be a watershed moment that will gauge the international community's determination to fight that scourge.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the gravity of the situation in Mali requires — and even demands — a reaction that is commensurate with the threat looming over an already unstable region. The success of the international force remains dependent, to a large extent, on the support that a unified and determined international community will show for the people of Mali in order to see the ideals of peace, liberty and justice prevail throughout the world.

The recent hostage-taking at the Algerian gas refinery on the border with Libya is clear proof of the collateral damage that will be incurred by the plot to turn the Sahelo-Saharan region into a new sanctuary for international terrorism. If we allow that to happen, no country, region or continent will be spared.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chad.

Mr. Allam-mi (Chad) (spoke in French): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, and to extend our congratulations to you for having put the situation in Mali on the Council's agenda at such short notice, thus demonstrating — as if it were necessary — that your country is committed to dealing with all matters related to the maintenance of international peace and security throughout the world. My country welcomes this.

The terrorists wanted to catch the international community unawares, in order to control all of Mali and turn it into truly reliable staging grounds for their operations in the subregion and throughout the world. That is something that could have been foreseen very early on, at least in Chad's view, as we were among the countries that first stressed the urgent need for the international community to take appropriate measures to eradicate this evil before it spread throughout the Sahel and beyond.

It was clear that the situation constituted a grave threat to peace and security, not only in Mali and the subregion but throughout the world. A failure to act promptly would have opened the door to an expansion of terrorism, obscurantism and organized crime. The international community had to act to guarantee collective security, which was under daily threat by this scourge that was centred in Mali.

The President of Chad, His Excellency Mr. Idriss Deby Itno, therefore did not hesitate to commend France — and other *de facto* allies — for so promptly responding to the Malian President's appeal to halt the southward progression of the terrorists. Moreover, he called on African States and the entire international community to support the truly lifesaving initiative of the French army.

The new situation emerging in Mali as a result of the terrorists' intention to extend their occupation into the south of Mali means that the French intervention is a case of acting under force majeure, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2085 (2012), with a view, of course, to ensuring the speedy establishment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and, ultimately, achieving a peaceful political solution to the crisis.

It is in that context that my country decided to send a military contingent of 2,000 troops to Mali, made up

of one infantry regiment and two support battalions. Chad responded to the request of 14 January by Mali's Head of State, Mr. Dioncounda Traoré, and the calls by the African Union, confirmed in the letter of 16 January from the Peace and Security Commissioner of the African Union, in accordance with resolution 2085 (2012). That decision by the Government of Chad was unanimously supported by Chad's national assembly, including the majority and the opposition.

My delegation welcomes the unanimous support shown by the members of the Council to France and the African countries that have mobilized in support of Mali in these difficult circumstances. That diplomatic support must be continued and be strengthened to ensure that the terrorists, in their desperation, cannot exploit any weakness. Furthermore, on the practical level we urge the international community as a whole, especially the United Nations, immediately to provide the logistical means necessary — a logistical support package — to the troops arriving in Mali. In addition to the urgent need for the logistical support of the United Nations, the African-led International Support Mission in Mali also needs the necessary financial support so that it can successfully carry out its tasks.

My country has called on the Secretary-General and the African Union Commission to meet that need. Africa hopes that the international community will forthwith give concrete expression to its solidarity in the form of logistics at the donors conference to be held in Addis Ababa on 29 January 2013, in accordance with paragraph 22 of resolution 2085 (2012).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Kogda (Burkina Faso) (spoke in French): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month, and to thank you for holding this public debate on the situation in Mali.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the observer of the African Union Commission and the representative of the Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The crisis that has struck Mali in recent months unfortunately took a dramatic turn a few weeks ago with an outbreak of attacks by armed groups seeking to conquer the southern part of the territory, in spite of warnings by the international community and a call

for dialogue for a peaceful settlement of the crisis. The ECOWAS mediator for Mali, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, deplored the violation of the commitments made by the Malian parties as a result of their meeting on 4 December 2012 in Ouagadougou, and condemned the resumption of hostilities. The armed group Ansar Dine, in deciding to join terrorist and extremist forces in attacking Malian units in Konna, has seriously violated the declaration of cessation of hostilities and repudiated its public rejection of terrorism, thereby compromising the possibility of a negotiated exit to the crisis.

There is no need to dwell on the tireless efforts of the countries of the region and ECOWAS to broker a dialogue between the Government of Mali and the rebel movements in the north that had pledged to break all ties with the terrorist groups. Throughout the process of political dialogue, the ECOWAS mediator and associate mediator, Mr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, patiently and firmly indicated to the different protagonists, including Ansar Dine and the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), the benefits conducting frank negotiations on the basis of objective grievances, which would preserve the unity and territorial integrity of Mali and obviate the use of force.

Unfortunately, the unilateral breakdown of the dialogue and the rejection of the commitments by some protagonists, particularly Ansar Dine, has left ECOWAS and the international community with no choice but to use force against the extremist groups, which have revealed the limits of their good faith.

My delegation takes this opportunity to thank France for its diligent response to Mali's requests to contain the advance of terrorist groups. Burkina Faso welcomes the courageous decision of French President François Hollande to provide prompt and critical support for the restoration of peace and stability in Mali and therefore throughout the entire region. Burkina Faso calls on the international community to immediately implement resolution 2085 (2012) authorizing the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali by supporting France's action on the ground, particularly by providing military logistics and the speedy establishment of the trust fund.

With respect to Burkina Faso, the announced deployment of a battalion of 500 men to Mali, alongside the ECOWAS troops, is being implemented. Moreover, a force of 1,000 men has been deployed along the border

with Mali to stave off infiltrations by fleeing terrorist groups.

In conclusion, Burkina Faso will spare no effort in supporting the struggle against terrorism in all its forms and in restoring the territorial integrity of Mali. Burkina Faso affirms its readiness, once the situation has been stabilized, to work to promote a dialogue and the effective conduct of the political process in order to reach national reconciliation and to establish lasting peace in Mali.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Niger.

Mr. Boureima (Niger) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to express my delegation's pleasure at seeing you, Mr. President, presiding over the Security Council for the month of January. We warmly congratulate you. I also wish to thank you for having organized this briefing, which is an ideal opportunity to discuss a matter of great importance to us all, namely, the situation in Mali. I would also like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his informative briefing.

This briefing, which follows the public ministerial debate on a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism (see S/PV.6900), held on 15 January under your presidency, Sir, once again demonstrates the great importance that you and your great country attach to the issue of peace and security, particularly in the Sahel region.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire on behalf of the States members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and that delivered by the Permanent Observer of the African Union. I would just like to add a few comments of my own.

The situation in Mali has gone on too long. That should not have happened because the international community's eyes have long been focused on the threats looming over the entire Sahel following the crisis in Libya. Indeed, the joint United Nations-African Union mission to assess the impact of the crisis in Libya on the countries of the region was exhaustive in its diagnosis and even provided appropriate recommendations. Meanwhile, the high-level meeting on the situation in Mali, initiated by the Secretary-General, was also very clear as to the need to effectively, comprehensively and above all promptly address the problems of the region

in general, and those in Mali in particular, in order to forestall an even graver state of affairs.

Certainly, everybody took an interest in the situation, encouraged by ECOWAS, the African Union and other stakeholders. However, the progressive and sensitive approach, far from leading to a peaceful settlement, appears on the contrary to have encouraged the armed groups, which soon exploited the institutional crisis to consolidate their dominance of the entire north of Mali. They must have viewed the phased reaction of the United Nations through the adoption of successive resolutions 2056 (2012) of 5 July, 2071 (2012) of 12 October and 2085 (2012) of 20 December 2012 as sign of lax resolve to counter their Machiavellian intentions. They therefore dared to venture farther south in ultimate effort to occupy the entire country.

Had it not been for the prompt and beneficial action taken by France, which quickly grasped the implications of the fall of the city of Kona to the armed groups, the situation today might be very different. That is why the entire international community must, as did the Conference of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, commend France's intervention, which forestalled a situation that would have been very difficult to remedy. It must also provide effective and timely support to the joint efforts deployed by the forces of Mali and of France.

Over and above the legitimacy and legality conferred by the express request made by the authorities of Mali under the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, and specifically pursuant to article 51, which enshrines the universally recognized principle of individual and collective self-defence, France's intervention is, in our view, consistent with the spirit of resolution 2085 (2012), whose ultimate objective is none other than the restoration of Mali's territorial integrity — an essential precondition for the implementation of the other provisions of the resolution.

It is in that same spirit that the Conference of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS authorized the deployment of the international force, the African-led international support mission for Mali (AFISMA); neighbouring and friendly countries are involved in that context.

For its part, the Niger, which is deeply concerned about the situation in Mali, will participate in AFISMA; in fact, the Deputy Force Commander is a general from the Niger. Niger also recently increased

the number of its troops from 500 to 650. I must also take this opportunity to state that all the constitutional formalities have been complied with and that the contingent is ready to go. This morning it was visited, before its imminent deployment, by the President of the Republic, the Head of State and of the army, His Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, whose firm commitment to Mali since the outset of the crisis has been unflagging.

My country welcomes the expressions of solidarity with Mali, which are becoming more and more numerous and whose nature and scope will be made clear at the donors conference to be held in Addis Ababa on 29 January and in the meeting of the international support and follow-up group, to be hosted by the European Union in Brussels on 5 February.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Benin.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (spoke in French): May I begin, Sir, by once again congratulating you most warmly on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and thanking you for having convened this important meeting on Mali, which is being held at a critical juncture in the history of the country. Over and above Mali, the crisis affects the stability of the entire Sahel region, West Africa and the continent as a whole, and even the entire world. I wish also to thank Mr. Feltman for his very informative briefing on the situation.

Since northern Mali fell under the control of fundamentalist groups, the whole world has witnessed grave violations of human rights and the destruction of the cultural heritage of that country. That heritage is part of the historical memory of Africa; UNESCO has rightly determined it to be the heritage of all humankind and called for the mobilization of resources to restore the sites that have been destroyed.

We pay tribute to all agencies and partners, as well as those persons of goodwill, who are seeking to provide humanitarian aid to the peoples affected by the crisis, particularly refugees and internally displaced persons.

The evolution of the situation in Mali has dispelled any doubt as to the nature of the threat and the challenges faced by Mali. The crisis in that country is the undeniable outcome of the fall of the former Libyan regime and in particular the result of the inflow of hegemonistic outside elements with ties to criminal networks and religious extremists, who have sought to

subjugate a free and independent State by making use of a tiny subgroup of one of the ethnic minorities.

Since 10 January 2013, they have clearly shown themselves to be terrorists and they have made clear the nature of the threat that they pose to the State of Mali. Over and above their actions in Mali, in recent days they have attacked Algeria's vital infrastructures, causing the deaths of innocent victims who had been taken hostage as retribution for that country's support for the efforts undertaken against the terrorists in Mali. Here Benin wishes to convey its condolences to the families of the victims of that attack, including the hostages, dozens of whom died at the hands of the terrorists. May their souls rest in peace.

There is no doubt that Mali will recover from this situation. It will rise again to pay tribute to the illustrious memory of its sons and friends who died on the battlefield to prevent the country from falling to the terrorists. Indeed, Mali is a State member of the Community of Democracies and the site of the conception and adoption of the Bamako Declaration, which in November 2000 laid down a shared conception of democracy in francophone countries.

In the view of Benin, Mali is and wishes to remain a secular State. Mali's borders have impregnable ramparts forged by respect by its neighbours for the principle of the intangibility of borders, which is so dear to the African Union, and by the recognition of the territorial integrity of Mali by the international community.

Mali can count on the solidarity of the States of Africa in general and those of West Africa in particular, which are strongly committed to regional integration and to mutual defence among its member countries.

At no time was Benin's belief shaken that the free world would not let Bamako fall into the hands of a transnational criminal network masquerading in different forms. The President of the Republic of Benin, His Excellency Mr. Boni Yayi, has reiterated his belief in the ability of the international community to demonstrate the necessary decisiveness with respect to the advancing threat of religious intolerance and fanatical fundamentalism, which fuel terrorism, which is seeking safe haven in Mali.

We wish to express our admiration of and deep gratitude to France, historically Mali's closest partner beyond the continent. At the decisive moment, France, through a robust intervention, came to the assistance of the Malian State, at the request of its legitimate

authorities. It came to Africa's help a few hours after the urgent appeal launched by President Yayi, in his capacity as Chairman of the African Union, in the face of the swelling ranks of armed criminal groups advancing on Bamako.

France's intervention brought firepower consistent with the threat looming over Mali, stopped the aggressors from advancing and paved the way for the arrival of troops of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that are part of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). The developing situation has placed Mali in a situation of extreme urgency and requires an immediate increase of AFISMA's strength, mindful of the fact that it is an international force open to all contributions from other African countries that wish to participate in destroying the terrorist hydra in the Sahel.

We thank the countries that are providing logistical support for the deployment of the ECOWAS and African Union troops. AFISMA must be able to rapidly deploy its full capacity, in terms of troops and equipment, in order to assert itself on the ground before the terrorist groups with the sustained support of France and all countries of the free world highly concerned by the situation.

For us, the start of that military campaign is fully authorized by resolution 2085 (2012). The United Nations should immediately deploy to the African Union and ECOWAS the logistics, equipment and financial support package provided for by the resolution, and finance the implementation of the Organization's earmarked resources and other available resources ahead of the donor conference expected to help set up the trust fund, pursuant to paragraph 22 of the resolution.

In that regard, we thank the Secretary-General for his relevant proposals to the Security Council, on which we have been briefed here. We urge him to act on the most appropriate options to respond to the urgent situation on the ground so that the lack of resources and assistance does not jeopardize the lives of the deployed troops. We encourage France to maintain its active presence on the ground and to maintain its offensive position to prevent the terrorist groups from retaking the initiative.

That said, their leaders, who have the greatest responsibility for the crimes committed against humanity, should be sought out, found and brought

before international justice for their heinous crimes. Beyond the military campaign in Mali, the international community should redouble efforts to cut the supply lines and financial channels to the terrorist groups raging in the Sahara desert and should put an end to the trafficking from which they live.

Benin has decided to actively participate in AFISMA by making available the most battle-tested elements of its armed forces. In this Chamber, Benin launches an urgent appeal for international solidarity, in particular the material and financial support of all countries devoted to peace and justice, and to the troops of African States being deployed to commit themselves as soon as possible alongside the French troops and the Malian armed forces.

The prompt success of the military action under way will make it possible to launch the democratic process that will lead to free and transparent elections open to all Malians, from north to south, east to west, pursuant to resolution 2085 (2012). The United Nations must take all necessary measures to support that campaign and to prepare the ensuing political process. My delegation welcomes the deployment of the advance team of the United Nations political mission. The political process should be conducted in strict respect for the national loyalty owed by all communities that make up Mali to the Malian nation and for their increasing inclusiveness, while taking fully into account their influence in relation to the country's demography.

The United Nations must ensure that the terrorists answer for their acts before an appropriate international jurisdiction. Beyond the military campaign, it is necessary to redouble efforts to promote dialogue at the level of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in order to counter all kinds of fanaticism and fundamentalism.

In that way, we can prevent the resurgence of practices of past ages in order to promote the progress of humankind in upholding the common values of respect for dignity and the integrity of the individual for the greater good of its nations and peoples.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to commend you, Mr. President, for convening this rather important meeting. I would also like to congratulate you on mounting the exhibition on Pakistan's 52 years of service to the international

community through its peacekeeping efforts, which you undertook yesterday. We are not far behind you. We have been participating in peacekeeping missions for 52 years and, as long as circumstances permit, we will continue to do so.

We would like to sincerely commend Mr. Feltman and to congratulate him on the comprehensive message that he has sent to the international community today. We thank him for briefing us on the unhappy situation in Mali. We also thank him for mentioning the loss of lives of our soldiers, who are brutally attacked by terrorists on account of a decision to deploy to Mali. That is a price that we are willing to pay and we will not run away from our responsibility to Mali or any other country in the region.

I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in Mali in his country's capacity as Chairperson of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). We also wish to congratulate and thank the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations for providing the African Union (AU) overview of the situation in Mali.

This is a very timely meeting as it comes only days after the convening of the Extraordinary Session of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in Abidjan on 19 January. We would particularly like to draw attention to the Final Communiqué of that meeting as it is rather central to the resolution of the Malian crisis.

Let me seize this opportunity to express our deep and heartfelt condolences to the Government and people of Algeria for the loss of lives of both innocent hostages and members of the security forces in the recent heinous terrorist attack at the gas plant in Amenas. In strongly condemning those senseless and inhumane acts of violence, Nigeria stands together with other members of the international community, especially those countries that lost some of their nationals in the horrific incident. Such acts regrettably remind us that the scourge of terrorism remains a continuing challenge and that no country is immune from its malignant tentacles.

While we convey our deepest sympathies and condolences to the traumatized and bereaved families, my delegation wishes to reiterate that the Security Council has a critical role to play as a forum for advancing collective action against global terrorism.

The fight against terrorism remains a very high priority for Nigeria both domestically and across our subregion. We also recognize the terrible threat that Mali is now facing from terrorist groups and armed militants. As part of the unfolding international effort to free Mali of this threat and danger, Nigeria has commenced the accelerated deployment of 1,200 troops as part of its contribution to the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). We note with satisfaction that other ECOWAS and AU member States and other countries have also decided to contribute troops in support of the Malian army's efforts to free its country from the terrorist and extremist menace.

As has already been mentioned, Major-General Shehu Usman Abdulkadir of the Nigerian Army was endorsed as Force Commander of AFISMA by ECOWAS Heads of State and Government at their recent meeting in Abidjan. It is important to underline the fact that the availability of a Nigerian military officer to head AFISMA and Nigeria's financial assistance to Mali, as well as the role of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as associate mediator in Mali, together with President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, are all reflections of our deep concern at and interest in the security situation in Mali and the subregion as a whole.

Nigeria's actions are in line with the Security Council's decision of 10 January and resolution 2085 (2012), which calls for the rapid deployment of AFISMA and the strengthening of international support for Mali. Nigeria desires a peaceful resolution of all disputes. Indeed, in October 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan undertook a mission to Bamako to meet with all parties and foster dialogue. However, in a situation where room for such reconciliation is not allowed or given, regrettably the use of force becomes inevitable and indeed necessary.

Our action in Mali is in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, and therefore needs no justification or defence. We are also adhering to the norms and principles that underpin the protocols of our regional grouping, ECOWAS, on collective security and the protection of member States' territorial integrity. We went into Mali to assist its army to free its territory and defend its integrity, independence and unity.

Beyond all of these considerations, we would like to underscore the fact that the Sahel region and countries like Mali have been ignored or neglected by the international community for too long. The

sufferings of their people and the deteriorating security situation were not deemed worthy of the attention of the world until matters became compounded and it was too late to deal with them peacefully. The debate of the Security Council on 10 December 2012 (see S/PV.6882) and the high-level meeting on the Sahel convened by the Secretary-General on 26 September 2012 were, in our view, actually more about the neglect of the Sahel region than anything else. The Secretary-General had consistently drawn attention to the situation in the region, and had the foresight to draw up an integrated regional strategy for the Sahel. His appointment of Mr. Romano Prodi as his Special Envoy for the Sahel also reflected his concern.

Sufficient, accelerated and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance is desperately needed for the entire Sahel region. In the medium and longer terms, structured peacebuilding initiatives, the strengthening of security sector reform and institution-building — including good governance, the entrenchment of democratic institutions, human rights and youth empowerment — are direly need across the region. Nigeria therefore recognizes that the use of force, while necessary to tackling the immediate terrorist threat and instability in Mali and the entire region, cannot be an effective long-term strategy or solution.

The international community must do more. Promoting uniform economic development and increasing development assistance would enable the Governments of the region to address the root causes of instability and conflicts. They would, for instance, be able to address concerns such as extreme poverty, the impacts of climate change, pervasive illiteracy, unemployment, general discontent and even secessionist tendencies, if they were properly assisted by the rest of the world financially and materially. This would no doubt help to engender cohesion, counter extremism and reduce the appeal of violence.

It is in that connection that Nigeria would urge the active participation of all Member States in the donors conference, scheduled for 29 January in Addis Ababa, for the trust fund established in paragraph 22 of resolution 2085 (2012). We hope that the donors conference will galvanize all Member States, international organizations, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to work in concert for the attainment of the common objective of tackling terrorism and

addressing human rights and humanitarian concerns in the subregion.

My delegation wishes to commend the unique and invaluable contributions of France and other countries, including Niger, our sister country Chad, Togo and the many others that have pledged troops to this onerous effort of the global community to restore the sovereignty of Mali. The pivotal and timely action of France, in the light of the deteriorating security situation in Mali and in the context of the resolution 2085 (2012), was a key lesson of the significant value that a single country can add to global counter-terrorism efforts. There is no doubt that the impact of the French efforts and the significant contributions of many countries towards assisting Mali in the resolution of its security and institutional crisis confirm that close and systematic cooperation among Member States is an essential prerequisite and effective strategy for tackling terrorism.

It is our hope that similar commitment and forward-looking action will be taken by the world in addressing other concerns of the countries in the Sahel and in supporting the United Nations to achieve the objectives of the Secretary-General's integrated regional strategy for the Sahel.

The President: I now give the floor to Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his important and informative briefing.

(spoke in French)

I also thank the Permanent Representative of Mali for his statement today.

The European Union condemns the actions carried out by terrorist and criminal groups against the Malian Armed Forces, threatening the territorial integrity of the country and the safety of its population. Against such a backdrop and in keeping with relevant resolutions of the Security Council — specifically resolutions 2056 (2012), 2071 (2012) and especially 2085 (2012) — the European Union supports the efforts of the region and of the international community. We welcome the rapid response of France, with the support of other States members of the European Union and a number of African countries, to the request from the President of Mali for military assistance against terrorist and criminal groups.

The European Union supports the rapid deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), pursuant to resolution 2085 (2012), and reiterates its commitment to swiftly providing financial assistance to the Mission, in particular through the mobilization of the African Peace Facility. Preparations are under way to provide financial and logistical support in close cooperation with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States.

The European Union will also participate in the donors conference scheduled for 29 January in Addis Ababa. In that context, the European Union takes a favourable view of the most recent letter of the Secretary-General on the different options for providing logistical support to AFISMA. The European Union hopes that the Security Council will be able to quickly decide on authorizing a solid system for financing the Mission.

In response to the direct request of the Malian authorities, and in accordance with resolution 2085 (2012), the European Union decided to deploy a training mission to provide military training to the Malian Armed Forces. Brigadier General François Lecointre has been appointed Force Commander, and an initial technical team should arrive in Bamako in the coming days in order to deploy the Mission in February.

Political progress is crucial to ensuring stability in Mali over the long term. In that respect, the European Union earnestly requests the Malian authorities to adopt and implement as soon as possible a road map to re-establish democracy and constitutional order. It encourages an inclusive national dialogue open to the populations of the north and all groups that have rejected terrorism and recognized the territorial integrity of the country. The army must be reformed and placed under civil authority. Once those conditions are met, the European Union is determined to gradually resume its development cooperation and to swiftly disburse the scheduled funding.

The European Union reiterates the importance it attaches to close cooperation with the Malian efforts and those of other regional and international partners. Accordingly, and in close connection with the United Nations and the African Union, the European Union is planning to convene, in Brussels on 5 February, the next ministerial meeting of the international support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali, as many have mentioned today.

The European Union is prepared to strengthen without delay its support for the efforts of humanitarian organizations to assist the populations in Mali and neighbouring countries in need. It emphasizes the importance of effective coordination among humanitarian stakeholders under United Nations auspices, and reiterates its call on all parties involved to allow unfettered humanitarian access to populations in need and to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

The European Union calls on all parties to ensure the protection of civilian populations and to respect international humanitarian law and human rights. Very particular attention should be focused on the situation of children — not only those who live in combat zones or who carry weapons, but also those whose daily lives have been disrupted by forced displacement or humanitarian problems. All parties and individuals

engaged in Mali will be held accountable for their actions.

The European Union emphasizes the importance of maintaining stability in the Sahel and of preventing a negative impact on neighbouring countries. In that context, it reiterates its commitment to supporting Mali's neighbours as part of its Sahel strategy in order to strengthen their security and development. To that end, the appointment of a Special Representative of the European Union for the Sahel should be forthcoming shortly.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.



Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6906th meeting

 Wednesday, 23 January 2013, 10 a.m.
 New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Masood Khan/Mr. Tarar	(Pakistan)
<i>Members:</i>	Argentina	Mr. Oyarzábal
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Sharifov
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . .	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

13-21446 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Egypt, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Namibia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Allow me to start by congratulating the new members of the Security Council at the start of their term. Let me also welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Malki, and the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Ron Prosor.

We meet today against the backdrop of ongoing events in the Middle East that could affect the peace process itself. Israel held elections yesterday, and Jordan is holding elections today. The United States Administration also commenced a second term this week.

While the process of forming a Government in Israel could take weeks, we look forward to engaging the next Israeli Government in the common pursuit of peace. This is not a time to be idle. Instead, we are entering a critical period in which concerted action will be vital if we are to salvage the two-State solution. The Secretary-General has repeatedly highlighted the fact that 2013 will be a decisive year for the two-State solution and that the parties must now show the political will to cooperate with new renewed effort to achieve it.

I recently visited Egypt and Jordan — two key Arab stakeholders with peace treaties with Israel — and my interlocutors reiterated their direct interest in assisting the parties to realize the two-State solution at long last, and their concern over the dire regional consequences if not movement is achieved. Regional and international partners are increasingly alarmed that the only way to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with resolutions and international law is slipping away. They have also questioned the effectiveness of international efforts to bring about decisive results.

The Quartet envoys met again on 10 January in Amman, Jordan. Everyone recognized the urgent need for action, but I must express my genuine concern that a clear and realistic path ahead is still lacking. The United Nations will remain an integral part of efforts to urgently address the dangerous political vacuum, and we are willing to work with any initiative that will achieve our common goal, including in the context of the Quartet. We have also taken note of the European Union (EU) Council decision of 10 December that reaffirmed the EU's vision for a way forward. We look forward in particular to renewed United States engagement.

No international effort alone is sufficient for progress absent the requisite will on the part of the parties

themselves. If they want to provide themselves and others with the opportunity to get on track in the period ahead, then now is not the time for actions that further undermine mutual trust. As previously reported, after the General Assembly accorded Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations, we witnessed developments such as a dramatic increase in Israeli settlements announcements, including in the critical E-1 area, and the withholding and redirection by Israel of tax revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, which have been widely deplored, including by the United Nations. President Abbas has warned that building in E-1 is a red line and that if plans proceed he would consider raising his opposition in international forums, including the International Criminal Court. I urge both sides to abstain from actions that will make efforts to resume meaningful negotiations even harder in the critical period ahead, and I call on Israel to restore the timely, predictable and transparent transfers of tax and customs revenues without further delay.

The withholding of clearance revenues has already seriously weakened the capacity of the Palestinian Government to meet its obligations. Key among these is the payment of salaries to civil servants, who have only received partial salaries since November and launched strikes in protest since mid-December. The Government also ended the refugee exemption from paying for electricity, which resulted in protests and clashes with Palestinian security on 1 January in Nablus.

In 2012, the recurrent budget deficit of the Palestinian Authority exceeded \$1 billion. International contributions amounted to \$600 million in support of the recurrent budget last year, but further timely disbursement of aid is essential to sustain institution-building and prevent the disruption of core operations. I welcome reports of the recent contribution from Saudi Arabia and statements of support by some Gulf States during yesterday's Riyadh summit, but members of the League of Arab States have yet to provide financial assistance pursuant to their communiqué of 9 December, and I urge them to do so urgently and to heed to the appeals of Prime Minister Fayyad. At the same time, we should be under no illusion — the viability of the Palestinian Authority will be increasingly at stake if its standing is based on political quicksand. Ultimately, there is no future for the Palestinian Authority without a two-State solution.

All this is taking place amid worrying events and trends on the ground, including continued settlement

construction and increased violence. In East Jerusalem, on 19 December plans to approve 2,600 units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos were advanced, and 1,242 units were approved on 25 December in the settlement of Gilo. On 19 December, Israeli authorities advanced a plan to build 523 units in the Gush Etzion settlement south-west of Bethlehem. On 16 January, there were further tenders issued for construction in Efrat and Kiryat Arba, near Hebron. The reporting period also witnessed continued activity in Palestinian neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, including Beit Safafa and related to the construction of a military academy on the Mount of Olives. Israeli security forces demolished 105 structures in the occupied West Bank during the reporting period, resulting in the displacement of 170 Palestinians. Settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law and cannot prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations. Clashes between settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank resulted in 14 Palestinian casualties, including one girl who was shot dead this morning near Hebron.

The reporting period has been characterized by increased Israeli operations — a total of 379 — and arrests in the West Bank, both of which are up nearly 90 per cent compared to the last reporting period, as well as increased clashes and renewed protests over the fate of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. There are also continuing signs of tensions in security coordination, including the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) arrest of one Palestinian security officer at a checkpoint near Nablus. As a result of the operations, two Palestinians, including a teenager, were killed, 158 injured and 379 arrested. Four Israeli soldiers were also injured. Increased use of live fire by Israeli security forces has been reported in the West Bank and is of concern.

On 1 and 3 January, undercover Israeli operations, in one instance to arrest a member of Islamic Jihad, resulted in clashes with civilians injured by live ammunition. On 25 December, Israeli security forces arrested 10 members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in Ramallah and other West Bank villages. Two of them allegedly confessed to planning to kidnap Israelis in order to force the release of PFLP leader Ahmad Saadat.

Palestinian attacks on Israeli security forces in the West Bank included throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, in one instance against an IDF post at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem on 27 December. A repeat

attempt was thwarted by Palestinian security forces on 1 January. On 5 January, Palestinian security forces arrested members of a Palestinian group in Hebron that had announced a third intifada and threatened to abduct IDF soldiers. Palestinian security forces also intervened in several refugee camps to prevent some members of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades from rearming and reverting to armed resistance. Demonstrations in Ramallah over the alleged Israeli mistreatment of Palestinian prisoners led to clashes with Palestinian security forces on 20 January. We continue to be concerned about the fate of Palestinian prisoners on administrative detention in Israeli jails, especially those on prolonged hunger strike.

All of these events paints a grim picture and, absent a new perspective on the political track, I fear that such negative trends will only worsen.

Palestinian demonstrations continued to be organized against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. On 11 January, over 100 Palestinians and international activists moved to the E-1 area of the West Bank and established an encampment named Bab al-Shams — or “Gateway to the Sun” — consisting of over 20 large tents, aimed at countering Israeli plans to expand settlement construction there. Demonstrators were evicted in the early hours of 13 January. On 18 January, the Secretariat received a letter from Ambassador Prosser in which he considered the incident as “a provocation staged against Israel”. The Secretary-General has expressed his grave disappointment about the announced plans for Israeli settlement construction in the so-called E-1 area and repeated his call that such plans must be rescinded. The Secretary-General also stresses the importance for protests to continue to remain peaceful and for the right to peaceful protest to be fully respected. Another encampment named Bab Al-Karamah — Gateway to Dignity — was set up on 18 January in the Palestinian village of Beit Iksa, between Jerusalem and Ramallah, to impede the construction of the barrier on village land. The encampment was subsequently dismantled by Israeli security forces on 21 January.

In Gaza the calm brokered by Egypt in November has largely held, but remains tenuous. It is significant to report that no rockets or mortar shells landed in Israel during the reporting period, and only one rocket has landed in Israel since the end of November. Israeli forces conducted three incursions into Gaza during this

period and fired six tank shells. One Palestinian civilian was killed and 10 Palestinian civilians were injured by Israeli fire, mostly while attempting to approach the border fence. I traveled to Cairo last week to continue our close work with Egyptian authorities to encourage further progress on all aspects of the understanding for the ceasefire.

As part of its commitments in the understanding reached, Israel began to allow gravel for commercial use through the Kerem Shalom crossing. In the past month 551 trucks, carrying more than 38,000 tons of gravel, entered Gaza. Israel has also allowed Palestinian farmers access up to 100 metres from the fence with Israel, and Palestinian fishermen have been able to access up to six nautical miles from shore. That is important progress. However, a further extension of the fishing limit to at least nine nautical miles is necessary for a significant increase in the catch of the fishermen. We also continue to call for the unrestricted entry of all construction materials. Assessments of damage to residential properties and civilian infrastructure resulting from the escalation in November 2012 highlight the urgent need to remove the ongoing restrictions. Further measures to lift the closure should include transfers of goods between Gaza and the West Bank, exports to Israel and beyond and, as needed, increased capacity at Kerem Shalom and the reopening of the Sufa crossing. To further advance that important agenda and address Israel's legitimate security interests, it is essential that efforts continue in parallel to enforce the calm and prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza.

In a new development, since 29 December, Egypt has allowed the entry of an average of 30 trucks per day carrying construction materials through the Rafah crossing for a range of Qatar-funded projects.

Implementing resolution 1860 (2009) in full also means overcoming the Palestinian divide. In that regard, President Abbas met with Hamas leader Khaled Meshal on 10 January in Cairo to discuss the implementation of previous Palestinian reconciliation deals. On 17 January, members of Fatah and Hamas held in Cairo the first of what is intended to become a series of regular meetings. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) temporary body that includes all PLO factions as well as the leaders of groups outside of the PLO is expected to meet in early February. In addition, both sides have made positive gestures, as Fatah was permitted to hold an anniversary rally in Gaza earlier

this month, following the Hamas anniversary rallies in the West Bank during the previous reporting period. Reconciliation and negotiations remain essential for achieving the two-State solution. The peace process and reconciliation is not an either-or proposition and must be made compatible by advancing both in a mutually reinforcing way. But for real progress to be made, the time has come for Hamas to make clear where it stands on the central issues at stake.

Turning now to Syria, I will be succinct, as the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, will brief the Council at the end of this month.

The conflict, now in its twenty-second month, continues unabated. Nearly 60,000 persons were killed between 15 March 2011 and 30 November 2012. Thousands remain in detention. Many have suffered torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence. Indiscriminate shelling, armed clashes and the general state of insecurity have driven more than 670,000 Syrians outside the country. There are now more than 18,000 Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria being hosted in Lebanon, assisted by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, up from 10,000 in early December, as well as 3,200 in Jordan. More than 67,000 Iraqi refugees from Syria have had to return to Iraq. Since mid-December Yarmouk Camp, a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus, has been the site of fighting between Syrian rebels and gunmen loyal to the Government, leading to massive displacement of the camp's population.

On 21 January, the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Representative expressed deep disappointment and anguish at the appalling levels of killing and destruction carried out by both the Government and the opposition, fuelled by outside Powers providing weaponry to both sides. They also expressed their consternation about the lack of a unified international posture that could lead to a transition as agreed at Geneva last June and put an end to the desperate suffering of the Syrian people.

The United Nations is doing its utmost to assist all in need inside and outside Syria. The Secretary-General will chair a high-level donor conference in Kuwait on 30 January to support our humanitarian assistance programmes. We are hopeful that Member States will contribute generously to bridge the funding gap.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) remains volatile. Armed clashes between the Syrian army and armed opposition take place sporadically inside the area of separation, posing risks to the ceasefire between Israel and Syria as well as to the safety and security of civilians and UNDOF personnel. That situation clearly jeopardizes regional stability and the ceasefire between the two countries. We have repeatedly called on both sides to respect the Disengagement Agreement.

The situation in Lebanon has been relatively quiet since last month's briefing, in spite of persisting tensions linked with the ongoing conflict in Syria. In Tripoli the Lebanese Armed Forces continued to maintain calm between the Sunni and Alawite communities of Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. There was, however, an attack on the convoy of the Minister of Youth on 18 January, in which 11 were injured. One 11-year-old Lebanese boy was killed by gunfire coming from Syria on 25 December, but generally the bad weather and heavy snow in the border region contributed to a decrease in violence and in smuggling activity. The nine Lebanese pilgrims who have remained in the custody of Syrian opposition forces since May 2012 have still not been released. The bodies of some 10 of the fighters killed in the Tel Kalakh incident on 30 November were returned for burial in Lebanon, and at least one Lebanese fighter is believed to be held by Syrian Government forces.

As a result of the continued political stalemate between the two main blocs, the session of the national dialogue scheduled for 7 January was postponed indefinitely by President Sleiman, who continues to hold consultations with all parties. Members of a parliamentary subcommittee started a series of meetings on 8 January to discuss the different proposed drafts of a new electoral law. It is a positive development that the parties are working together constructively in that manner. We hope that broad consensus will emerge over a new law. It is important that elections be held on time, in accordance with the Constitution and for the stability of the country.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon remained generally quiet and stable. Israeli violations of the Lebanese airspace continued on a frequent basis.

In conclusion, given internal political calendars, we have weeks to prepare for a new initiative. Israeli and Palestinian leaders have stated, like us, that they

are convinced that the two-State solution is the only path towards a durable peace. But they should realize that, absent serious engagement, the peace process will remain on life-support and stability on the ground will be put at risk even further. The consequences of inaction could be dire for everyone. The parties must therefore not only remain open to new initiatives to overcome the current impasse, they must also demonstrate their seriousness. If Israel is serious about the two-State solution, it must recognize the negative impact of continued settlement construction. Palestinian seriousness could be demonstrated by pausing further action in the international arena while talks begin.

Both parties must reaffirm their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, one that would fulfil resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), resolve the core issues — territory, security, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and water — and constitute the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and all claims related to it. As a result of negotiations, two States for two peoples, Israel and Palestine, will live side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition of each other's legitimate rights, including the right to self-determination. Each State will ensure equal civil rights for all its citizens and will be committed to respect for human rights and human dignity.

That, in our view, is in essence the vision of a two-State solution endorsed by the international community and accepted in the Arab Peace Initiative as the basis for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving regional peace. None of the steps to realize that vision are easy, but we cannot afford another year without courageous action undertaken for the purpose of achieving a two-State solution.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Malki (Palestine) (spoke in Arabic): On behalf of the State of Palestine, I congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country, Pakistan, on your effective presidency and wise stewardship of the Security Council this month. We also express our deep appreciation to the fraternal Kingdom of Morocco for its skilled leadership of the Council in December.

I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal

Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing today and for his tireless efforts on the ground.

I also wish to extend Palestine's warm congratulations to the new Security Council members, the friendly countries of Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, the Republic of Korea and Rwanda. We are confident of their commitment to upholding the Charter, international law and the Council's resolutions, without exception, and we wish them every success in fulfilling their great responsibilities. I also convey Palestine's deep appreciation to the members whose terms ended in December 2012 — the friendly countries of Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa. We are grateful for the tireless efforts they exerted during their tenure in support of the rights of the Palestinian people and in aiming to reach a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I am honoured to address the Security Council today for the first time on behalf of the State of Palestine following the historic decision by the General Assembly to accord Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations with its adoption of resolution 67/19, on 29 November 2012. The overwhelming support of Member States for that initiative is a reflection of the strong support for the inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to a life of freedom and dignity in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That support clearly represents long-overdue recognition by the Assembly of Palestine's statehood. A new era has begun, and we hope it will mark a turning point for making peace and security a reality between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, and in the region as a whole.

We are grateful for the principled support demonstrated in that courageous decision taken by Member States at this juncture in history. It is high time that the State of Palestine take its rightful place among the community of nations. Our hope is renewed by that important step, which should pave the way for the acceptance of our September 2011 application for full membership in the United Nations. Moreover, we are encouraged by the signs that that momentous step will reinvigorate the international community's long-standing, yet unfulfilled, commitment to achieving a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In that regard, it is clear that support for that resolution constituted an unequivocal reaffirmation of the international community's commitment to the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, from resolution 181 (II), of 1947, to resolution 242 (1967) and all other relevant resolutions thereafter, as well as the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. The urgency of that reaffirmation cannot be understated in the light of the two-State solution's severe denigration over the years and the collective consensus that the window of opportunity for justly and physically achieving that solution is rapidly closing. No one in the Chamber today can deny that.

The Assembly's adoption of resolution 67/19 must therefore be viewed as a legitimate, multilateral, peaceful and political effort to save the two-State solution, to reaffirm its basis and to create the proper environment for convening substantive negotiations between the parties — within a credible peace process based on the well-known terms of reference and according to a limited time frame — aimed at achieving an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 and at a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement that resolves all outstanding core issues, including Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners.

Despite that strong message by the international community, the period following the General Assembly's decision has regrettably witnessed Israeli actions that represent the complete antithesis of the two-State solution. The Palestinian leadership, under the stewardship of President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestine Liberation Organization — the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people — has reaffirmed its commitment to the path of peace and its immediate readiness to engage in negotiations on the basis of clear parameters. Israel, however, has persisted along the path of occupation, conflict and fear-mongering.

Rather than reciprocating with regard to the hand extended in peace, Israel has chosen to embark on a destructive escalation of its illegal agenda in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — the territory that constitutes the State of Palestine, which it has been illegitimately and forcibly occupying for over 45 years. As conveyed in a series of letters recently transmitted by the State of Palestine to the Security Council, Israel has persisted in behaving with utter

contempt, deliberately breaching international law and disregarding the will of the international community.

That has been most starkly reflected in its intensification of its illegal settlement campaign and its heavy-handed, punitive measures against the Palestinian people and their leadership in the aftermath of the adoption of resolution 67/19. These measures have included the withholding of Palestinian tax revenues, which has exacerbated the financial crisis and compromised the functioning of our national institutions and system of democratic governance. That has been accompanied by Israel's contempt for the international community, particularly the United Nations, as epitomized, *inter alia*, in the statement by the Israeli Ambassador in the General Assembly on 29 November (see A/67/PV.44) and the remarks by the Israeli Prime Minister on 21 December in an interview in which he defiantly insisted on Israel pursuing its illegal colonization programme and stated, "What the United Nations says doesn't interest me".

On the ground that attitude has manifested itself in the systematic escalation of Israel's illegal settlement campaign, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem. We recall that in December 2012, Israel blatantly announced its intentions to proceed with plans for the construction of more than 7,000 units in illegal settlements and the confiscation of hundreds more dunums of Palestinian land throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. At the core of that unprecedented settlement drive are plans to establish illegal settlements in sensitive areas to the east and south of occupied East Jerusalem, namely, the so-called E-1 area east of the city and a hill area between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, both of which are integral to the continuity and viability of the State of Palestine, as well as the settlement activities in the Al-Khalil area and the Jordan Valley. That provocative Israeli approach is also manifested in continuing terror and violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and property, under the protection and with the support of the Israeli Government.

We reiterate once again before this Council that it is abundantly clear under international law that all Israeli settlement activities are illegal. Regardless of whether it is one settlement unit or thousands, a settlement or an outpost — whatever the pretext, they are all illegal. Countless resolutions have affirmed that, as has the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of July 2004. Moreover, Israeli settlement activities constitute grave breaches of the

Fourth Geneva Convention, including war crimes, as further determined pursuant to Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Israel's illegal settlement campaign also constitutes the main obstacle to the attainment of a peace based on the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. A halt to settlement construction is not a precondition. It is a legal obligation. It requires the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and to act in such a way as to bring about a long-overdue solution to the conflict. We are at a pivotal moment. We should send a clear message to Israel to the effect that all such practices and policies are illegal and must be stopped. Otherwise, Israel will be held accountable for its violations and destruction of the two-State solution.

It is a fact that Israel has never been held accountable for its crimes. That has fostered its sense of impunity and encouraged its rejection of the path of peace. In that connection, it must be recalled that Israel's hostile and punitive behaviour following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19 was, in fact, preceded by yet another Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip, in November 2012, and repeated declarations by Israeli officials about their preferred path, that is, the path of war. Once again, a barrage of death, trauma and terror was inflicted on the Palestinian people by Israel forces, causing the death and injury of hundreds of Palestinians, including many women and children, and the destruction of homes and infrastructure through the indiscriminate Israeli bombing of densely populated civilian areas, including refugee camps.

That aggression, in addition to the Israeli blockade since 2007, has led to an escalation of the human suffering in Gaza in collective punishment of the population. Regrettably, other than issuing a press statement on 21 November 2012 (SC/10829) after the conclusion of the ceasefire agreement, the Security Council again failed to shoulder its responsibility to put an end to that Israeli aggression and to protect the Palestinian civilian population, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Nevertheless, at that time the Palestinian leadership reaffirmed, as it does now, its rejection of the path of war and its commitment to the path of peace. Public support for that position, which constitutes the core of the political policy of President Abbas and his Government,

was manifested across Palestine, in particular in Gaza, at the beginning of the year in the huge rallies held on 4 January to mark the forty-eighth anniversary of the Fatah movement, in support of President Abbas and long-standing Palestinian national aspirations.

The significance of that event must be highlighted and should serve as a clear reminder to those who question the Palestinian people's support for peace and the legitimate leadership of President Abbas. In that context, reconciliation between the Palestinian political factions, in particular Fatah and Hamas, is being pursued to end the division. That is one of the demands of our people and is vital to our national goals. In that connection, we reiterate our appreciation to the Arab Republic of Egypt, the League of Arab States and all other concerned parties for their efforts. We hope that Palestinian unity will soon be achieved and that it will be respected by the international community.

Despite Israel's ongoing provocations and hostilities, which increase tensions and destabilize the situation on the ground, the developments of 29 November 2012, the ceasefire agreement in Gaza and the popular non-violent acts of the Palestinian peaceful resistance to the occupation, most recently seen in the courageous establishment of the Bab Al-Shams and Bab Al-Karamah protest villages on confiscated Palestinian land marked for Israeli colonization and in the weekly demonstrations against the settlements and the wall in villages throughout Palestine, are all abundant evidence of the Palestinian commitment to the path of peace.

However, in choosing to blindly adhere to its expansionist agenda, Israel is undermining the contiguity and unity of the land of the State of Palestine, threatening the viability of the two-State solution. We are at a crossroads. Israel must choose either to honestly engage in a meaningful political process towards achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, which is a historic compromise and the relative justice to which we committed decades ago, or to force us into an era in which that solution is abandoned. The Palestinian people would enter a new stage in their national struggle to defend and achieve their rights through all peaceful, political, diplomatic and legal means available to the State of Palestine.

The international community has a historic responsibility before it. Action must be immediately undertaken, in particular by the Security Council, to compel Israel to stop its breaches of the law and to commit to the path of peace. Negotiations cannot succeed

if they are sabotaged by an unrelenting occupation that mocks and makes it impossible to achieve peace. Moreover, the past years have proved that the parties, left to an unbalanced and unfair negotiations process, cannot achieve peace. It is also necessary to reaffirm clear parameters for the solution and for the parties to commit to them.

Business as usual cannot continue. Bold leadership, in particular by those that have staked a claim in shepherding the peace process over the years, and a significant United Nations role, including by the Security Council, are required. That leadership must be consistent with the professed values of freedom, tolerance, human dignity and justice, which are the core elements for peace and stability in our world and our region, without exception. Strong political and moral will are needed to salvage the two-State solution and to help the two parties overcome the political deadlock in order to guarantee a successful political process for the realization of a final peace agreement during the critical year of 2013.

I would like to reiterate what President Mahmoud Abbas said to day in the wake of the Israeli elections: Palestine is willing to work with any future Israeli Government, provided that it is committed to the latest General Assembly resolution regarding the recognition of the State of Palestine along the pre-1967 borders.

The Palestinian people and its leadership remain committed to the two-State solution — as is the wider Arab and Islamic world — as reflected in the continued support for the historic Arab Peace Initiative since 2002. We appeal to the international community to heed the call for peace and to conscientiously support those who yearn for freedom, with a view to ushering in an era of long-overdue justice and independence for the Palestinian people and peace and security for Palestinians and Israelis.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): As we begin a new year, I want to take the opportunity to congratulate the five new members of the Security Council. I wish each and every one of them a lot of luck and success in navigating the sometimes stormy waters of the Chamber.

Yesterday the people of Israel went to the polls. Millions of men and women cast their ballots. Israeli democracy continues to flourish. Elections are just one component of Israel's vibrant democracy. Our

Government guarantees the protection of minorities, women and gays. Our courts ensure that everyone is accountable under the law. Our education system teaches tolerance and peace, not violence and hate.

We long for the day when the scenes of real elections built on the foundations of real democracy will spread to all corners of a safe, stable and secure Middle East. Such a day would mark a great turning point in the history of our region. My question to the Chamber is: How long must we wait? Today we see a far bleaker picture in much of the Middle East. Repression, instability and horrific violence continue to plague the region.

More than 60,000 have been killed in Syria in just the past two years. Al-Assad's victims include hundreds of Palestinians. Since we have heard so much about the Palestinian cause this morning, let me take this opportunity to remind the Council that Al-Assad has used fighter jets to bomb the refugee camps where Palestinians live in Syria and that Palestinians are fleeing the country by the thousands. In Lebanon more than 1 million live under the brutal oppression of Hizbullah, which has transformed the entire south of the country into an Iranian terror base.

The world's most dangerous weapons are moving within reach of our region's most dangerous actors. We face the frightening possibility that Al-Assad's vast stockpiles of chemical weapons could fall into the hands of Hizbullah or Al-Qaida. The Ayatollah regime in Iran threatens to combine its extremist ideology and advanced missile technology with nuclear weapons. The lives of millions hang in the balance.

Those are just a few of the great challenges that hang over the Middle East. Once again, none of them were prioritized for discussion this morning. Instead, the Security Council continues to use the monthly Middle East debate to single out, scrutinize and criticize Israel — an island of democracy in the world's greatest hotbed of tyranny.

I have a novel idea. Perhaps this discussion could occasionally spend some time examining why the situation in the Middle East remains unstable, undemocratic and violent. I will give the Council a hint: it has nothing to do with Israel.

There are many threats to security in our region. But the presence of Jewish homes in Jerusalem — the eternal capital of the Jewish people — has never been one of them. Jews have been building homes in Jerusalem

since the time of King David, 3,000 years ago. Jewish communities witnessed the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. They lived in Jerusalem throughout crusades and pogroms. Some here say that the preliminary building plans announced last month prevent a two-State solution, even though it is clear that all of those neighbourhoods will remain part of Israel in any final peace agreement.

I cannot understand how people can conclude that a Palestinian State cannot exist if there is contiguity between Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem, which are seven kilometres apart. Those who make that claim are the same people who stand up and speak about a contiguous State between Gaza and the West Bank — areas divided by more than 70 kilometres. Connecting Gaza and the West Bank would cut Israel into two. Yet, Israeli contiguity never seems to be a concern for some in the Chamber.

The briefing that we heard this morning was particularly selective in the facts it chose to present. For instance, it does not take a Sherlock Holmes or New York City Police Department detective to see that the fingerprints of senior Palestinian Authority officials were all over the recent provocations staged in the area known as E-1. Conveniently, the involvement of those Palestinian leaders in those activities was omitted, miraculously, from the briefing of this morning. Since selective perception is one of the greatest hallmarks of this debate, I would like to take a moment to set straight a few facts about the past two months.

In November 2012, President Abbas stood in the General Assembly Hall and submitted a unilateral resolution to that body (General Assembly resolution 67/19). He claimed it was an act of peace. He insisted that it was "the last chance to save the two-State solution" (A/67/PV.44, p. 3). The Palestinian delegation promised that they would immediately return to the negotiating table after the voting, without preconditions. I know that some in the Chamber voted for resolution 67/19 on that basis. Today, those nations who supported Abbas' bid have a duty to ask themselves: What, exactly, did we vote for?

Suffice it to say that the Palestinians have not lifted one finger to restart negotiations. We have seen neither a single gesture, nor a single statement, nor a single indication that they want to return to negotiations. Just 10 days after President Abbas spoke to the entire world about his commitment to a two-State solution, his political party — Fatah — released a new logo that

completely erased the State of Israel from the map. Make no mistake, the major obstacle to a two-State solution is the Palestinian refusal to speak to their own people about the true parameters of a two-State solution — to speak a lexicon of peace, not a litany of war.

One will never hear President Abbas or any other Palestinian leader use the phrase "two States for two peoples." One will not hear them say it because they have called for an independent Palestinian State but want millions of their people to flood the Jewish State. That would mean the destruction of Israel. Let me be clear: that is not a solution for peace, and no one who truly believes in peace could ever accept it.

Some in the Chamber may say that the Palestinians know that they will have to give up the claim of return at the negotiating table. Some Palestinian leaders might even whisper it quietly behind closed doors. But they have never, ever, said it publicly. The Palestinian people have no idea that they will one day have to give up that claim of return. Since the Palestinian leadership refuses to tell the Palestinian people the truth, the international community has the responsibility to tell them the truth. Those truly interested in peace will begin by speaking out forcefully and publicly and unequivocally against that claim. We cannot abide by the voices of the selectively principled.

Last December, a few days after President Abbas appeared at the United Nations, we heard a very public statement from Khaled Mashaal, the political chief of Hamas. At a rally for hundreds of thousands in Gaza, he called for Israel's complete and total destruction. He said, "Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north; there will be no concession on one inch of land".

One would think that the call for Israel's destruction might merit a joint statement of concern from some prominent and some permanent members of the Council. I was told that some of the prominent and permanent members said something about that casual call for Israel's destruction. Israel is known for having amazing listening devices. The members must have whispered something so quietly that even our most sensitive equipment was not able to pick it up.

Apparently, Mashaal's speech was not only of concern to President Abbas. Instead of seeking peace with Israel through negotiations, he has devoted all his energy to seeking unity with Hamas. Hamas is the same terrorist organization that fired thousands of rockets

into the heart of Israeli cities last November. It is the same terrorist organization that commits a double war crime as a matter of policy, using Palestinian schools to fire rockets at Israeli schools. The Hamas charter calls for the destruction of Israel and the genocide of Jews. It has turned Gaza into a destination of choice; I would say a Club Med for global Jihadists.

Some in the Chamber have the audacity to suggest that Israel should also welcome Hamas with open arms. I ask, would they say the same if Islamic militants were firing rockets into their backyards? Would they say the same to France, which is now working with the Government of Mali to fight Al-Qaida in the Sahel? France's Foreign Minister said this month that his country was fighting to prevent the creation of an Islamist terrorist enclave "at the doorstep of France and Europe". If Mali is on France's doorstep, Gaza is in Israel's living room. Let me be perfectly clear. France's principled stand should be commended. We only ask that France and all the countries that are supporting its principled stand today support Israel tomorrow when we fight Islamic terrorism on our borders.

The Palestinian representative speaks in the Chamber as if he represents a Jeffersonian democracy. Yet, no amount of rhetoric, spin or bluster can change one simple fact: the Palestinians clearly fail to meet the most basic criteria for statehood. The only Palestinian State in the Chamber is the Palestinian state of denial. Last month's resolution did not confer Palestinian statehood. It did not constitute recognition of a Palestinian State. Many Member States made that clear on 29 November and in the days that followed. Israel has placed its view on record in connection with the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19. That position remains unchanged. The recent resolution does not entitle the Palestinians to participate in United Nations meetings and international conferences, join treaties or seek membership in international organizations as a State. The change in terminology and titles risks creating a false impression of Palestinian statehood, when no such State exists. That is clearly not mandated by resolution 67/19. In the real world statehood comes with control of territory. Yet, the resolution did not change the fact that the Palestinian Authority has no control over Gaza. That is 40 per cent of the territory that President Abbas claims to represent.

Any efforts to alter the Palestinian status outside the agreed negotiating framework directly violate the agreements between the parties. Those agreements

include specific limitations on the Palestinian capacity in the sphere of foreign relations. They contain express obligations to resolve all outstanding issues through negotiations, and to refrain from any step that seeks to alter the legal status of the West Bank and Gaza pending the outcome of negotiations. Acting to facilitate violations of those agreements undermines the credibility of the Organization, which has repeatedly affirmed that a Palestinian State can only emerge as a result of bilateral negotiations.

Moreover, resolution 67/19 cannot serve as acceptable terms of reference for future negotiations. The resolution not only contradicts agreed terms of reference, it also seeks to predetermine some issues explicitly reserved for negotiation, while ignoring others such as security and the end of claims, which are core components of any future agreement. The campaign that the Palestinian leadership has waged at the United Nations is a false idol for the Palestinian people. There is only one route to statehood. It does not travel through this Chamber in New York. It runs through direct negotiations between Jerusalem and Ramallah. There are no shortcuts, no quick fixes, no instant solutions. Peace must be negotiated; it cannot be imposed.

Exactly 67 years ago this week, on 17 January 1946, the Security Council held its first meeting at Westminster in London. On that day, the Council clearly defined its mission, namely, to advance global peace and security, to oppose tyranny and to safeguard the rights of all people. It would be a true understatement to say that the monthly debate on the Middle East falls far short of that standard. Most of the millions in our regions who live under oppression, fear and violence are completely ignored in the debate. They are cast aside to make way for a litany of half-truths, myths and outright lies about Israel. Repeating a lie does not make it true. Repeating a constant flood of falsehoods does not and cannot change the facts. The simple fact remains that Israel is not what is wrong in the Middle East. Israel is what is right in the Middle East. Make no mistake: cynical politics do no favours for the Arab world. The silence of the Council in the face of terror does no favours for those seeking a brighter future. It is time to do some soul-searching in the Chamber. The Council needs a Global Positioning System to find its moral centre in the debate on the Middle East. Just weeks after the Council's founding, Sir Winston Churchill outlined the challenges facing us today. He said the following about the newly formed United

Nations: "We must make sure that its work is fruitful, that it is a reality and not a sham, ... that it is a true temple of peace...and not merely a cockpit in a Tower of Babel".

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing.

The terrorist attacks in the desert of Algeria, the threat posed by Iran and its nuclear programme and the internal challenges with which Arab societies today are grappling to make their Governments more democratic and more responsive to the needs of their people, all make the Middle East a region that must command our enduring attention and active engagement. Today I will focus on the Palestinian question and the Syrian crisis.

The current financial crisis in the Palestinian territories is severe, and the recent news of Saudi Arabia's generous \$100 million donation to the Palestinian Authority is welcome. We have made enormous investments in the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people that we wish to be sustained, including through the immediate resumption of regular-clearance revenue transfers. Over the years, no Government has invested more in assistance to the Palestinians than the United States. We remain committed to supporting the Palestinian people.

Yet, as we all know, the vote on 29 November 2012 in the General Assembly (resolution 67/19) has not brought the Palestinians any closer to our common goal of achieving a State. As we have said repeatedly, the only way to establish a real Palestinian State is through the painstaking work of direct negotiations on final status issues, without preconditions, between the Israelis and Palestinians. General Assembly resolution 67/19 cannot be viewed as establishing terms of reference or as prejudging any final status issues, notably with respect to territory. These are simply inescapable facts.

The United States therefore remains fully committed to direct negotiations, and we will continue to work vigorously towards that end. We are consulting with the parties and international partners on the way forward, and we are underscoring that every step taken must aim to reduce tensions and create a climate for peace. The Quartet envoys met earlier this month in Jordan to discuss the measures necessary to create a positive atmosphere conducive to future negotiations.

That meeting followed United States Special Envoy David Hale's engagement with Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Egyptian and Arab League leaders to advance Middle East peace and security, including by maintaining and strengthening the Gaza ceasefire.

Throughout our engagement, we have reiterated our long-standing opposition to Israel's West Bank settlement activity and to construction in East Jerusalem, which run counter to the cause of peace. Construction in the E-1 area would be especially damaging to efforts to achieve a two-State solution, and we have urged Israeli leaders to reconsider those unilateral decisions and to exercise restraint. For decades, the United States has not accepted the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity, and we oppose any efforts to legalize outposts. We will continue to urge leaders on both sides to avoid unilateral steps and provocations that make peace negotiations harder to resume.

The position of the United States regarding Palestinian status, including as reflected in our explanation of vote in connection with the adoption of Assembly resolution 67/19 (A/67/PV.44, page 13), remains unchanged. The United States does not consider that the resolution bestows Palestinian statehood or recognition. Only direct negotiations to settle final status issues will lead to that outcome. In our view, therefore, any references to the State of Palestine in the United Nations, including the use of the term "State of Palestine" on the placard in the Security Council, or the use of the term "State of Palestine" in the invitation to this meeting or in other arrangements for participation in this meeting, do not reflect our acquiescence to the view that Palestine is a State. That statement of our position shall apply to Palestinian participation in meetings of the Security Council or other United Nations meetings, regardless of whether the United States specifically intervenes on this matter in the future.

Let me now turn to Syria, where the situation is dire and deteriorating. We have seen a sharp increase in indiscriminate attacks in the past month. In a small village outside Homs, regime militia reportedly killed more than 100 people last week, including entire families and numerous children. The regime's air strikes near the University of Aleppo killed 87, and attacks on health clinics and hospitals across the country have made it impossible for wounded civilians to seek help. In the face of those mounting atrocities, we reiterate our utter condemnation of any attack directed against unarmed

civilians. At all levels, those responsible for atrocities, no matter what their allegiance, will be identified and held accountable.

As the transition proceeds, we stand ready to assist Syria's new leaders in their efforts to address issues of accountability and reconciliation. For that purpose, the United States will continue to support Syrian and international efforts to document evidence of atrocities committed by all sides, for use in future accountability processes. The international community should also play a role in ensuring that any future domestic accountability processes have the expertise they need to meet international standards.

On the political and diplomatic front, I underscore my Government's strong support and gratitude for Joint Special Representative Brahimi's efforts to find a durable solution to this crisis. Every member of the Council knows that a political transition would be the fastest and most effective way to end the horrific bloodshed. The United States will therefore continue to engage with our partners, both on and off the Council, to support a meaningful political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. In that regard, I reaffirm our commitment to the principles outlined in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), including a transitional body with full executive powers formed on the basis of mutual consent.

At the same time, we are continuing our efforts to support the Syrian opposition coalition as it works towards a more unified opposition that is able to start addressing the needs of the Syrian people now. We are supporting the coalition's assistance coordination unit, so that increased assistance gets to local councils providing basic services. In addition to more than \$210 million in humanitarian assistance, the United States has contributed more than \$50 million to bolster Syrian civil society, including its emerging leaders, in order to help them communicate, organize and prepare for an eventual political transition.

The burden is on all of us to help the millions of people displaced and in urgent need of lifesaving assistance. There is no doubt that the tireless work of many United Nations agencies in delivering such aid, including the support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, has saved countless lives. We look forward to the United Nations pledging conference in Kuwait on 30 January and encourage States to increase their contributions to the two combined United Nations appeals. We also

encourage United Nations agencies and donors to seek more opportunities for cross-border assistance, to help Syrians in underserved areas and to work with the Syrian opposition coalition's assistance coordination unit to respond to needs on the ground.

We will continue to help Syria's neighbours, including Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, to respond to the influx of refugees. We appreciate their generosity in affording shelter and services to nearly 630,000 refugees — a number sure to rise as long as Al-Assad's forces continue their assault. We commend the Lebanese Government's recent approval of a refugee response plan and encourage all neighbouring Governments to maintain open borders to those fleeing Al-Assad's brutality.

Difficult days lie ahead, especially as long as Al-Assad remains in power. We continue to support all Syrians, within and outside the Government, who aim to bring an end to the bloody Al-Assad regime and build a democratic and unified Syria in which the rule of law is respected. We will continue to seek the valuable contributions of the international community to that end.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Serry, for his detailed assessment of the situation in the Middle East. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Malki, who is taking the floor for the first time in this Chamber in his new capacity as observer of the observer State to the United Nations.

We carefully listened to the statement by the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Prosor. I will be frank — we do not understand everything that Mr. Prosor said to the Security Council today, but we recognize that, at this stage, the Security Council, for well-known reasons, has not been able to reach a unified position allowing for true progress in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement.

The solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has long been at a deadlock. The attempts made in 2012 to establish contacts for negotiation between the Palestinians and Israelis, with the assistance of the Middle East Quartet and other interested parties, were unsuccessful. In spite of the ongoing calm in the Gaza Strip after the November clashes, the military and political situation on the whole remains far from stable. The situation is exacerbated by continuing Israeli

settlement activities. There has been an unprecedented surge in those activities, and that is a matter of concern. According to Israeli non-governmental organizations, in 2012 alone the building of 7,000 housing units was approved, while one year earlier that number was 1,770 and, in 2010, 570 units were approved.

The recent events surrounding the so-called E-1 area demonstrate that unfortunately, in spite of the strong appeals of the international community, the Israeli authorities do not intend to review their settlement policy. This distances us even farther from the prospects of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; it represents an outright violation of the Security Council resolutions and the road map and undermines the possibilities of a settlement on the basis of two States.

An already difficult situation is exacerbated by heavy-handed financial pressure on Palestinian authorities, from whom Israel has withheld tax and tariff revenue. This exacerbates complex social, economic and humanitarian problems in the Palestinian territories. Additional steps are needed to clear the way for a full economic exchange between the Gaza Strip and the outside world. We are convinced that the longer the current alarming status quo continues, the worse its effect will be on the process of resuming the negotiations.

The path to breaking through the stalemate and easing the tensions in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is well known. There is a need to cease unilateral actions and to rebuild trust between the parties in the interest of resuming dialogue on the agreed bases, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Going forward, this would allow for a discussion of the pressing final status issues, including borders, Jerusalem, refugees and water.

Along those lines, we welcome the critically important and timely appeal — made in December 2012 at the summit of the Ministerial Committee of the League of Arab States on the Arab Peace Initiative — for a resumption of the negotiating process on the basis of well-known international legal provisions. The final goal of such dialogue would be an end to the Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent, viable and territorially integral Palestinian State, living in peace and security with Israel. We hope that the new

Israeli Government, as soon it is established, will duly take into account the need to move beyond mistrust and to re-engage in a substantive negotiations process.

A crucial factor for implementing any agreement with Israel is the establishment of inter-Palestinian reconciliation. We hope for practical results as an outcome of the agreements achieved between the leaders of Fatah and Hamas in Cairo last week.

For its part, Russia, bilaterally and in international forums, including first and foremost the Quartet of international mediators, continues to assist in overcoming the stalemate in the Palestinian-Israeli situation by relaunching the negotiating process to achieve lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis. In that context, we call, among other things, for a speedy convening of the ministerial meeting of the Quartet and more active participation by the League of Arab States in its work.

The recent exacerbation of the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria, in particular in the Yarmouk camp outside Damascus, was a striking reminder of the harmful deadlock in the Middle Eastern situation. Clashes between pro-Government and opposition forces led to the movement of many Palestinian refugees to Lebanon, further destabilizing an already difficult situation in that country. In that respect, we note the affirmed Palestinian position of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Arab States, including in the Syrian conflict.

With respect to the situation in Syria as a whole, Russia advocates a continuation of collective efforts to find a solution to the conflict in that country on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group (S/2012/523, annex). In that context, we are providing necessary support to the activities of Joint Special Representative Brahimi. We feel that a solution to the crisis must be political and attained through Syrian-led dialogue on the basis of the principles of international law. In that connection, all parties to the conflict must cease all violence and be guided solely by the greater interests of the Syrian people and the task of ensuring their security and the democratic and free development of the country.

While the international community bears significant responsibility for resolving the Syrian crisis, in the final analysis it must be a Syrian-led process. In that connection, we regret that the Syrian opposition has not taken steps to engage in dialogue. We are convinced

that the time has come for such a step, in particular as the Syrian Government has conveyed a willingness to negotiate with a broad section of the opposition forces.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

In these early weeks of 2013, the Middle East is undermined by two crises that, after another year of blockade and paralysis, call for resolute action on the part of the international community.

First, with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Secretary-General has continuously warned us over the course of the past year that the window of opportunity for a two-State solution is closing. The options now are simple. Either 2013 will be a year in which substantive negotiations are undertaken, leading to a final agreement settling all issues and demands, or it will see the disappearance of this unique opportunity to establish peace via a viable, independent, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State, living in peace and security within recognized borders alongside the Israeli State, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the two States.

Indeed, the reality on the ground cannot be denied, given the latest announcements of the Israeli Government on settlement activity, in particular in the E-1 area, that if completed would separate Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank — that is, from the State of which the eastern part of the city should be the capital. We condemn that settlement policy, which is illegal and a serious obstacle to peace.

In that context, the withholding by Israel of taxes and tariffs collected on behalf the Palestinian Authority is a counterproductive retaliation measure that we have called upon Israel not to take after the General Assembly's sovereign vote. It must stop. It exacerbates a financial crisis in the Palestinian Authority that undermines the successful institutional reforms achieved. Donors must mobilize to address this problem. The European Union will soon allocate a large part of its annual contribution to the Palestinian budget, and France will also endeavour to make a first payment of its budgetary assistance as quickly as possible.

However, it is time to stop talking about the two-State solution; we must work to realize it in 2013. We know how many efforts have been made since the Oslo

Accords, first and foremost by the United States. We recognize also the courage needed by the leaders in both Israel and Palestine. But in order for their future efforts to bear fruit, it is essential to define a framework likely to relaunch substantive discussions on all final status issues in an adequate climate of trust and within a realistic timeline. With our European partners, we have already proposed parameters for defining that framework. We call on all key stakeholders in such a process — the new American Administration as well as regional partners — to make a new commitment on the basis of those principles, with the active support of the international community as a whole. A new approach is needed, with the active support of the United States, the Europeans and the Arabs. France will give unstinting support to those efforts, including within the Security Council and the European Union.

However, no process will materialize without the will of the parties to restart substantive negotiations immediately and without preconditions. That implies, on the Palestinian side, that they make constructive use of the status resulting from resolution 67/19, adopted on 29 November by the General Assembly, and, on the Israeli side, that the next Government concretely show its peaceful intentions so that the trust shaken, particularly by the unilateral measures, may be re-established.

To reach a final settlement, inter-Palestinian reconciliation under the auspices of President Abbas, in conformity with the principles of the Palestine Liberation Organization, is necessary. We welcome the Egyptian efforts to that end. It is important to support partners for peace and not to offer a platform for Hamas radicals, whose declaration with respect to Israel we condemn, as we have always done, in French and Hebrew, on the site of our embassy in Tel Aviv.

We are pleased that the ceasefire in Gaza is holding, but it needs to be strengthened. That involves combating arms trafficking and lifting the blockade against Gaza, in order to offer other political horizons for the residents of Gaza and ensure the security of Israel for the long term. France and its European partners are ready to contribute to that effort, in particular through the reactivation and strengthening of the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah.

My second subject is Syria. The year 2013 must also be the year of the liberation of the Syrian people, whose situation is tragic. Ms. Valerie Amos and Ms. Navi Pillay described for us again on Friday the

ordeal of the Syrian population — at least 60,000 dead, 600,000 refugees, and 4 million people, mostly women and children, in utter destitution. Despite the repeated condemnations of the international community, the Damascus regime continues to violate international law by using cluster bombs, incendiary bombs and now ballistic missiles against its own people. We recall that any use of chemical weapons by the regime of Bashir Al-Assad would be unacceptable and would lead to a reaction from the international community.

In that context, the Council's inability to take action is scandalous. That is why with 58 other States we have called on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We must not let the silence draw a veil across the war crimes and crimes against humanity that are being perpetrated in Syria today. We must not stop demanding that the Syrian authorities, their agents and their accomplices be brought to account before the Syrian people and the international community after Syria's liberation. That is a precondition for reconciliation in the country.

With regard to humanitarian issues, the emergency calls for a response that covers all affected Syrians, including in the liberated areas. We support the efforts of the humanitarian coordinator, Ms. Amos, as well as those of the specialized agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to expand access to populations in need. It is absolutely necessary that the Syrian authorities authorize the full range of humanitarian actors to operate in their territory, whether or not it be under their control. Confronted with the immense needs within Syria, as well as in countries of the region, where more than 600,000 Syrians have sought refuge, donors must remobilize. In that connection, we welcome the organization of the Kuwait conference by the Secretary-General.

France will also continue to work in coordination with the Syrian National Coalition and its assistance coordination unit to bring aid to vulnerable populations that do not have access to traditional assistance channels. We support the contacts that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has made with the Coalition to ensure access to zones liberated by the opposition.

But beyond the humanitarian crisis and the human rights issues, the way out of the Syrian crisis remains political. We have therefore worked for a transition in line with the aspirations of the Syrian people. We

support the efforts of the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi, to reach a solution, and we welcome his resolve. Unfortunately, President Al-Assad, in his statement of 6 January — a speech he could have delivered 18 months ago, without alterations — showed once again that he had closed the door on a political transition.

Nevertheless, to encourage that possibility, France is helping the opposition to develop a structure and actively prepare for transition. The creation of the Syrian National Coalition, recognized by more than a hundred States on 12 December in Marrakech, is a major political turning point, as it shows the international community that the Coalition represents the credible political alternative we had hoped for, based on principles of inclusiveness, democracy, national unity and respect for human rights. Today, a majority of Members of the United Nations recognize and support it. We will continue to support this project, which represents the aspirations of the Syrian people. We encourage all the Members of the Organization to do the same.

A quick transition in Syria depends on regional security and stability. The displacement of populations and the socioeconomic tensions resulting from the Syrian crisis for the neighbouring countries, as well as the intensification of violence such as the regime's attempts to export the crisis, are destabilizing factors. We once again remind the Syrian regime of its obligations with regard to respect for the territorial integrity of neighbouring States, primarily its obligations with regard to Lebanon and Turkey. Similarly, in the Golan, the violation of the area of limitation must stop.

Faced with these risks of destabilization, France is offering its support to the countries that are generously taking in refugees. We also recall our solidarity with Turkey and the Council's commitment to the end of impunity in Lebanon respect for its integrity and sovereignty. France continues to offer its support to the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to preserve the unity and stability of the country, and it encourages all Lebanese political stakeholders to constructively take part in the consultations led by President Sleiman to that end.

The international community must remobilize to find without delay a way to settle the two crises. If the year 2013 does not see the achievement of a two-State solution, the West Bank and Gaza will be swept up in the regional turmoil and radicalization. All the efforts

made since Oslo would be reduced to nothing. If 2013 does not see the transition in Syria, we will have to bear responsibility for the destabilization of the entire region.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we want to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We also thank Mr. Riad Malki and the representative of Israel for their briefings.

Some question the frequency with which we address this issue in the Security Council. If that frequency were a function of progress made, perhaps our meetings would not be justified, since the few advances that have been made have been generally modest, and certainly not linear in nature. But if the frequency is tabulated as a function of the magnitude and intensity of changes, then our meetings are fully justified. A region that for forty years valued continuity over change has seen a frenzy of events since 2011 that point towards change, and even profound change. As with any transition, the consequences and outcomes of such change cannot be predicted, but at least they should be carefully monitored.

Today, I will not address the bigger picture, but will focus instead on two topical issues: the situation in Syria and the peace process in the Middle East.

With regard to the situation in Syria, the work of the Council throughout most of the past year was focused on the search for a political solution to the conflict that has gripped that country. Despite the efforts, first by Kofi Annan and then by Lakhdar Brahimi, throughout all those months we witnessed an increase in the use of violence by both the Government and the armed opposition, leading to the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, the suffering of millions of people and a humanitarian crisis of grave proportions.

Guatemala continues to believe strongly that the only solution to the conflict in Syria is rooted in a commitment by both parties to lay down their arms and negotiate a political exit. We understand that the logic of war, which seems to prevail with both parties — the Government and the armed opposition — prevents an easy solution. But it is clear that the prolongation of the armed struggle will only serve to increase sectarian hatred among the people, with the additional risk of spreading to neighbouring countries. In that context, the involvement of the international community will be essential.

Any transition agreement in Syria must be the product of an inclusive process led by the Syrian people in which the rights of all are respected. We believe that any transitional Government must have the support of all the Syrian people and must be the product of a democratic electoral process. Here it should be made clear, however, that those responsible for all crimes committed in Syria, whoever they are, must be punished for their actions. Atrocities of the magnitude of those that have occurred in Syria cannot be allowed to go unpunished.

Let me turn now to the Middle East peace process, including the Palestinian question. In 2013, 20 years will have passed since the signing of the Oslo Accords. It is very sad to recognize that we are no closer today to the solution of two sovereign States, living in peace within secure borders, than we were back in 1993. But the frustration built up over those 20 years by the lack of progress and by the deterioration linked to the proclivity of each party to blame the other for the lack of progress makes it today more urgent than ever to give that vision a chance finally to become reality.

At least for our part, we have not given up hope. When we consider the options for addressing what in our jargon is known as "the Palestinian question", the option of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and harmony within secure borders must not to be seen as an unattainable dream, but rather as the best and most viable option within reach. To achieve it, it is of course the parties directly involved who must show the political will and commitment to negotiate the content and scope of a final agreement. Direct negotiations between the parties is without doubt the only way to reach lasting agreements.

Until such negotiations occur, the international community must urge both sides to avoid any act, action or provocation that may hinder the possibility of a return to the negotiating table. This includes, of course, preventing the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, but also freezing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territory, as such settlements are illegal under international law. It is alarming that the Israeli Government continues to promote the construction of new settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in such sensitive areas as that known as E-1. The decision of the Israeli Government to withhold funds from tax revenues intended for the Palestinian Authority that

are intended to pay civil servants' salaries falls into the same category.

In other words, all the acts that on a daily basis threaten to crush the possibility of a lasting solution are unjustified and undermine any hope that these peoples may enjoy a life of peace and security. It is unjustifiable that the decisions of Governments and armed groups perpetuate hatred and separation between peoples who so desperately need to live together.

For all these reasons, we affirm that the international community, through the United Nations, has the obligation to condemn any and all violations, including with respect to security, and to take all actions necessary to put an end to such transgressions. The parties cannot be expected to act responsibly when others deliberately avoid condemning their actions.

Finally, my delegation believes that only by respecting the rights of each of these peoples and with a firm commitment to seek a peaceful solution will both be able to live together within strong and secure borders.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I should like to thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing and Palestinian Foreign Minister Mr. Malki and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their contributions to today's debate.

The events of the final two months of 2012 highlight the urgency with which we must all approach the Middle East peace process. Negotiations towards a two-State solution are the only way to ensure that the Israeli people have the security they are entitled to and that the Palestinian people have the State they deserve. The year 2013 is a critical year. The window is rapidly closing on the two-State solution. Without a concerted, urgent effort towards negotiations in 2013, we could find ourselves in a situation where there is no longer a two-State solution to speak of. There is a real risk that facts on the ground, in particular Israeli settlement activity, will mean that a viable Palestinian State is no longer possible. Without this, there will be no security for Israel. Furthermore, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains critical to the longer-term stability of the Middle East region.

The parties themselves are, of course, central to achieving a credible return to negotiations. We call upon both President Abbas and the next Israeli Prime Minister to demonstrate the bold, decisive leadership required to push the process forward. But the history

and politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict show that serious external leadership is also required to reinvigorate a return to negotiations. We look in particular to the United States to show that leadership and to drive the peace process forward.

The United Kingdom, with our European partners, stands ready to offer significant political and practical support. Together the international community has to make greater efforts in 2013 than anything seen since the Oslo peace accords 20 years ago.

The countries of the region have a vital role to play by setting out the positives that will flow from the resolution of the conflict, including greater long-term security for the Middle East region. We encourage the countries in the region to think about how they can make a positive contribution to help create a conducive environment for a return to negotiations.

If there is to be genuine progress in 2013, both sides must avoid steps that would risk setting the peace process back. For the Palestinian Authority, that means returning to negotiations without preconditions and avoiding steps that deepen the lack of trust. For the Government of Israel, that means being prepared to enter serious negotiations and ceasing settlement activity, which is illegal under international law.

On 17 December, following the announcement of more than 4,000 new settlement units, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Portugal delivered a statement in which we expressed our strong opposition to the plans by Israel to expand settlement construction in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and in particular plans to develop the E-1 area. Since then, we have seen yet more settlement activity, including the decision on 7 January to approve zoning boundaries which effectively designate the illegal outpost of Nofei Nehemia, in the north of the West Bank, as a settlement under Israeli law.

Tenders have been published for 198 settlement units in the Hebron area which, if built, would further jeopardize the territorial contiguity of any future Palestinian State. The United Kingdom condemns such actions, which are profoundly provocative and run contrary to the Geneva Conventions. Such steps are damaging to Israel's international reputation as well as to the peace process.

It is also vital that the Government of Israel reinstate the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, in line with its obligations under the Paris

Protocol. We understand that \$120 million per month is being withheld, which would normally account for 44 per cent of total Palestinian Authority spending.

The dire financial situation of the Palestinian Authority should be of concern to us all. It is in all of our interests to ensure that the Palestinian Authority is sustained. The United Kingdom is a principal supporter of the Palestinian Authority and will continue its strong support for its State-building work. We urge our international partners to do all they can in support, and we welcome the decision by the European Union to front-load its budget support to the Palestinian Authority by advancing €20 million this month.

The United Kingdom welcomes the work of those involved in the Gaza ceasefire negotiations and remains ready to support the parties in implementation. It is important now to work towards the easing of restrictions on Gaza, the end of arms smuggling and Palestinian reconciliation so as to increase the chances of achieving long-term peace.

We continue to follow developments linked to Palestinian reconciliation closely. A reconciled Palestinian polity is ultimately necessary for peace. We have made it consistently clear that we will engage with any Palestinian Government that shows, through both its words and its actions, that it is committed to the principles set out by President Abbas in Cairo in May 2011.

In Syria, the violence continues at a horrific rate, with the regime bearing the brunt of the responsibility through its use of air strikes, ballistic missiles and heavy weapons. Despite regime attempts to blame the opposition, it is now evident that the recent explosions at Aleppo University, which killed more than 80 people, were caused by missiles fired from regime jets. Terrible acts have been committed across Syria, and that is why we are supporting the call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

The Syrian opposition is increasingly credible and organized. It draws on the powerful yearning of the Syrian people for the freedom they have been denied for decades. The opposition has not only withstood the most brutal levels of repression imaginable, it has strengthened and consolidated its position as the Syrian people turn away from a discredited and disgraced regime.

The regime needs to understand that the Syrian people will not be slaughtered into submission. It

cannot crush the opposition by force. The regime must recognize the need to take the political route, which starts with meeting its obligations to bring about a sustained cessation of hostilities, as the Council has repeatedly demanded. We strongly support the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in his efforts to achieve that goal.

We want to see a peaceful political transition backed by the international community and the Council. But we must be realistic. No opposition movement that wants to play a role in Syria's future is going to be prepared to work with Al-Assad. One can make a strong moral argument for Al-Assad's departure, but there is an equally strong practical reality. Any transition that involves him is simply not sustainable. There needs to be a clear break from the leader who has unleashed this carnage on his own people.

We want the Council to play the role that it was established to fulfil. Its failure to do so, so far is a stain on its reputation. We are ready to work with Mr. Brahimi and to resume efforts in the Council to come together behind the steps that are necessary to secure a peaceful political transition.

But we need to be clear that the transition is already under way, whether we are influencing it or not. While the Council remains blocked, we and our partners will continue to work outside the Council to help the Syrian people prepare for the transition that they want and deserve.

In the meantime, the people of Syria continue to pay a terrible price under Al-Assad's brutal regime. The Kuwait donors conference to be held at the end of this month is an opportunity for the international community to step up its support for the multilateral effort to help those in dire need.

The United Kingdom has already contributed \$110 million to support the people of Syria and the region. But to date the overall contributions by the international community have been woefully inadequate. We must all be ready to increase our financial support to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (spoke in French): I should like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process, for his very comprehensive briefing, as well as

the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their respective statements.

Luxembourg fully endorses the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

I will begin with the peace process in the Middle East, before moving on to Syria.

The situation is troubling. Recent developments in the Middle East have given rise to great uncertainty. That is evident in the continuing increase in the number of settlements, in violation of international law; the repeated withholding of the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues; and the proliferation of provocative statements made by extremists from all sides.

Luxembourg is very concerned about the decisions taken by the Israeli authorities following the granting to Palestine by the General Assembly, on 29 November last, of the status of non-member observer State. Like its partners in the European Union, Luxembourg is deeply troubled by Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and particularly by the projects in the E-1 area. We are firmly opposed to this. Implementing those projects would seriously undermine the prospects for a negotiated settlement of the conflict by jeopardizing the chances for a viable, contiguous Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States.

Against that backdrop, tensions have increased alarmingly in the West Bank. The extremists on both sides mutually feed off their reciprocal and provocative acts. What can be said about the situation, except that such radicalization is a godsend for those seeking to prevent the dying peace process from reviving? What can be said about the statements that refuse to grant Israel the right to security, or even the right to exist, except that they are a way of preventing peace — as if after almost 65 years of conflict, against all odds, there is any kind of hope of resolving the conflict by avoiding genuine dialogue?

How do we relaunch the peace process? The basis for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East has been laid out many times. We are all familiar with the terms of that equation. The time has come to take bold and concrete measures to achieve peace. The negotiations between the parties must finally be resumed. Only negotiations will make it possible to deal with the root causes of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Whatever Government is formed after yesterday's elections in Israel, we hope that Israelis and Palestinians will act promptly and agree on the modalities for the immediate resumption of direct talks. On the basis of such an agreement, and in the context of a credible framework that is structured around clear parameters that lays out the basis for negotiations and that is itself based on a precise timetable, the negotiators can then agree on new and significant efforts to achieve peace. For such a resumption of negotiations to occur, appropriate international support will be necessary, as will decisive commitment from all key participants, including the United States.

In the Council, and as a member of the European Union, Luxembourg will do all it can to provide both parties with all the support they need to identify and accept a compromise that, when all is said and done, will necessarily be painful but necessary. The countries of the region have a crucial role to play in that respect.

We believe that an important part of the equation leading to a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will also involve reconciliation between the Palestinians, under the leadership of President Abbas. In that context, we welcome the mediation efforts undertaken by Egypt.

Allow me to add a few words on the subject of the unprecedented financial crisis that the Palestinian Authority is experiencing currently. Luxembourg appeals to Israel to promptly unblock, in keeping with the Paris Protocol, the transfer of fiscal revenues that it receives on behalf the Palestinian Authority. On a bilateral basis, Luxembourg contributes €500,000 annually to the Palestinian Authority. That contribution is in addition to the significant contributions of the European Union, to which Luxembourg, as a member of the European Union, also contributes. The European Union announced just last week the disbursement of €60 million to help the Palestinian Authority pay wages and pensions during the first quarter of 2013. We call on other donors, in particular the countries of the region, to show their solidarity. Otherwise, the viability of the Palestinian Authority and the process of establishing State infrastructure will be seriously jeopardized.

All the necessary support must also be given to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its activities in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. According to UNRWA reports, the 525,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria are among

the minorities most affected by the current conflict in Syria, with 80 per cent of them are dependent upon UNRWA for access to basic social services.

I now turn to the situation in Syria. During the Council's consultations on 18 January 2013, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, described the tragic situation in Syria, where human rights are trampled and humanitarian distress has reached unbelievable levels. The figures speak for themselves. After almost two years of conflict, over 60,000 people have died in the fighting. Over 4 million people are directly affected by the crisis and need humanitarian aid, while the continued hostilities and the current winter conditions compound the situation further. Now more than ever, humanitarian access must be ensured. We hope that Ms. Amos' visit to Syria will enable progress to be made in this respect, including with regard to essential assistance from neighbouring countries.

The international community, for its part, must do all it can to alleviate the suffering of the affected populations and to provide support to the neighbouring countries of Syria — Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq — which are generously and selflessly hosting the displaced Syrian population. The extent of the crisis is such that substantial financial resources will be necessary to meet the needs identified in the United Nations humanitarian aid plan for Syria and the region. The donor conference to be held on 30 January in Kuwait City must mobilize those resources. Luxembourg has, to date, made humanitarian contributions of €2 million to assist persons impacted by the Syrian crisis and is planning on announcing a substantial additional contribution on 30 January.

It is, however, as much a political emergency as a humanitarian one. In the end, the humanitarian challenges will only be resolved through a negotiated political outcome to the crisis. Syria must undertake a political transition process that meets the aspirations of all Syrians. That is the only way to restore peace in Syria and protect the security of the region. Otherwise, the list of atrocities will, alas, continue to grow.

We reiterate our full support to Mr. Brahimi's efforts to achieve a political outcome to the conflict as soon as possible. We must give him all the necessary support to allow him to make progress along that path. We owe that to the people of Syria, who are the victims,

above all, of the intransigence of the authorities who are clinging to power. Luxembourg stands shoulder to shoulder with the Syrian people in their courageous fight for freedom, dignity and democracy.

As Ms. Pillay emphasized last week, and as already stated by the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, human rights violations are increasingly prevalent in Syria. An increasing number of such actions could be qualified as war crimes or crimes against humanity. Those crimes cannot go unpunished. Those responsible for the atrocities committed in Syria must be held accountable for their acts, without distinction of any kind. This accountability applies first and foremost to the national authorities.

The international justice system has a complementary role to play in intervening where there is a refusal or inability to act at the national level. Syria clearly has not responded to the appeals of the international community in that regard. Luxembourg believes that, in the absence of a credible, fair and independent system of accountability, the International Criminal Court (ICC) must be seized of the situation. Luxembourg therefore supports the Swiss initiative to send a letter to the President of the Security Council calling on the Council to refer to the ICC the situation that has prevailed in Syria since March 2011, without exception and without distinction as regards the alleged perpetrators of those crimes (S/2013/19, annex). That request has been supported by 58 States from every region of the world. We will remain committed to ensuring that that appeal for accountability does not go unheard.

Mr. Nduhungirehe (Rwanda) (spoke in French): All me at the outset to thank you, Sir, for having organized this debate. I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the general situation in the region. I also welcome Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, and Ambassador Ron Prosor of Israel.

More than six decades after the creation of our Organization and the establishment of the State of Israel, the members of the Security Council are called upon once again to review their collective conscience concerning peace in the Middle East. Obviously, Rwanda is concerned over the political status quo in Israel and Palestine, and over the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank.

Like the African Union, Rwanda reiterates that only a political, two-State solution is viable for those two nations. It will require the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. In that regard, Rwanda is deeply concerned over various statements issued by the Israeli Government following the vote by the General Assembly on 29 November, according to the status of observer State to the United Nations. These statements include announcements of the construction of more than 7,000 new housing units in the West Bank, including 3,000 in the E-1 area of East Jerusalem.

Not only is this settlement policy a violation of international law, in particular the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, but it will also and above all divide the West Bank and make unviable the Palestinian State we all wish to see. Moreover, Rwanda calls on Israel to end all withholding of Palestinian tax revenues, which has already exacerbated an already critical humanitarian situation.

Nevertheless, Rwanda believes that the security of Israel and its people is critical to finding a political solution. In that respect, we condemn rocket fire and terrorist attacks on Israeli territory, as well as any disproportionate and indiscriminate response against the people of Gaza. We hope that the ceasefire achieved in Gaza thanks to the actions of Egyptian President Morsy will endure. We condemn any rhetoric from the Hamas leadership negating the very existence of Israel and calling for its destruction.

Rwanda firmly supports the Palestinian Authority, under President Abbas, and calls for the unity and reconciliation of the Palestinian people and its leaders. Rwanda supports Egypt's efforts to that end. Such reconciliation is a prerequisite for political consistency in upholding Palestinian interests. Nevertheless, any reconciliation among Palestinian leaders must go hand in hand with an unequivocal renunciation of terrorism on the part of certain Hamas leaders and their irreversible recognition of Israel's right to exist.

Our country reiterates that only direct political dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will lead to a lasting solution to the conflict. We hope that, following yesterday's elections in Israel, contact will resume between the two parties. In that regard, while strongly committed to the right of peoples to self-determination, Rwanda recalls that there is no shortcut to peace. Regrettably, history has taught that

any unilateral activity can only exacerbate an already tenuous situation. On the other hand, we support the Quartet's mediation efforts, although we regret the current diplomatic stalemate. We therefore call on the Quartet and other countries that have influence on the two parties to the conflict to redouble their efforts to devise new initiatives for peace in the Middle East.

Allow me to say a few words on the conflict in Syria. Rwanda condemns the violence in that country, which has led to more than 60,000 deaths in 22 months, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We recall that the responsibility to protect in Syria is borne primarily by the Syrian Government, whose army, according to many reports, is guilty of crimes of war and crimes against humanity. We also condemn the crimes committed by the opposition, including attacks committed by terrorist groups.

As with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we believe that a resolution to the Syrian conflict requires open and direct political dialogue. As Gandhi said, strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. We therefore call on all Syrian parties to demonstrate their strength and will by engaging in political dialogue, which is the only way to end the suffering of the Syrian people. In that regard, Rwanda pays tribute to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, for his untiring efforts on behalf of peace in Syria. We also believe that any political solution must be based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and ensure that justice is served to the Syrian people. We nevertheless reiterate our belief that Syrians must be masters of their own destiny and that any foreign intervention, be it military, political or legal, can only complicate an already difficult peace process.

In conclusion, it is clear that the status quo in the Middle East will have devastating consequences not only for the region, but also for the world as a whole. We recall that the current situation has for some time now empowered Islamic terrorism and promoted the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We therefore call on everyone to shoulder their responsibilities.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank Robert Serry for his report. We welcome the presence of Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki and Israel's Permanent Representative, Ambassador Prosor.

So often in this Council, we say that the situation between Israel and the Palestinians is at a crucial juncture, and it often is. But we now seem to be facing a decisive stage. The status quo is so evidently unsustainable. The prospect of a two-State solution is quickly disappearing. It is time for a new effort to resuscitate the peace process, but with a genuine focus not on the process but on the objective — peace.

The conflict in Israel and Gaza in November 2012 highlighted again the fundamental risks to peace and security of allowing the status quo to continue. Australia condemned the rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza. We recognized Israel's right to defend itself. Obviously, we welcomed the ceasefire and commended Egypt's leadership role in brokering the agreement, with support from others.

But it is critical for the ceasefire's the effective implementation that efforts to prevent the flow of weapons into Gaza be intensified. And while acknowledging that Israel has already taken some steps in this regard, there is an urgent need for a further relaxation of restrictions on the flow of lawful goods into and out of Gaza so that the Gazan economy can grow. Of course, a ceasefire does not guarantee lasting peace. The only way to secure that, as we know, is for both Israel and the Palestinians to resume negotiations without preconditions towards a two-state solution.

General Assembly resolution 67/19 on the Palestinians' status as a non-member observer State reflected international support for a future Palestinian State, as well as deep concern about the continuing stalemate on the ground. Australia abstained in the voting on the resolution, reflecting both our support for a Palestinian State and our concern that the only way to achieve the reality of statehood for Palestinians is through direct negotiations. Australia urged both Israel and the Palestinians not to exploit or overreact to the vote. Instead, actions by both sides must be in the interests of peace, and neither side should create obstacles to that objective.

Australia has therefore been deeply concerned by Israel's decisions to expand settlements. Settlements are illegal under international law; they undermine the prospects for peace and directly threaten the viability of a contiguous Palestinian State, and hence a negotiated two-State solution. The recent announcements in the E-1 block were of particular concern and took us further away from the path to peace, and we continue to be deeply concerned by instances of settler

violence. We also call on the Palestinian Authority to exercise restraint and to avoid provocative actions at international forums. We urge the Palestinians to resolve their internal differences, unite for peace and cease acts of violence against Israel.

At the same time, we need to reinforce the role of the Palestinian Authority, which is fundamental to stability in the region. We call on those countries in a position to do so to provide further financial support to the Authority. Australia has made a five-year commitment. It is also vital that tax transfers to the Authority be resumed.

Like all of us, Australia wants to see a secure Israel living in peace alongside a viable Palestinian State. Lasting security for Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian State cannot be achieved by unilateral actions. They can be achieved only through negotiation of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 boundaries, with agreed land swaps. Australia calls on Israel and the Palestinians to return to direct negotiations in good faith and prepared to make the compromises required by both sides to achieve a settlement. We also call on both sides to refrain from further actions that undermine confidence and damage the prospects for negotiations to resume.

The worsening conflict in Syria will soon enter its third year. The assessment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that the death toll has reached at least 60,000 should shock us. As a member of the Security Council, Australia will work to encourage a strong and unified response to bring about a process of political transition. We support the work of Joint Special Representative Brahimi, including his call for strong backing from the Council to enhance the prospects for transition. The Council needs to take a fresh look at how it can best support Mr Brahimi's efforts. Continued inaction will only condemn Syrians to further bloodshed and the region to greater instability.

President Al-Assad has had many opportunities to end the brutality against his own people. We have seen nothing that would suggest that he is willing to engage in meaningful negotiations. His speech on 6 January was not a step on the road to peace; it led down a cul-de-sac. He must step down now.

Australia joined more than 100 countries at the December Friends of Syria meeting in Marrakesh in acknowledging the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the legitimate

representative of the Syrian people. We are working with partners to ensure that the National Coalition is a responsible representative of the Syrian people. It is imperative that it abide by the norms of international humanitarian law.

As we know all too starkly, the humanitarian dimension of the conflict continues to worsen, increasing the need for international support, including through the current United Nations appeals. The meeting in Kuwait at the end of this month will be an essential opportunity to galvanize further support. Like many others, Australia is particularly concerned about securing adherence to international humanitarian law and ensuring the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel. We have advanced a humanitarian initiative for protecting medical facilities and workers in Syria, which is a major priority for us. We will continue to work with other countries to secure a commitment from all sides in the conflict not to target medical personnel, not to block access to doctors and hospitals, and not to attack medical facilities.

To conclude, as we approach the third year of the Syrian conflict, our collective efforts obviously must be directed towards an immediate end to the violence, the realization of a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of all of Syria's citizens, ensuring accountability for the crimes that are being committed and planning for post-conflict stabilization assistance to help rebuild Syria. The Council must play a decisive role in all of that.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I wish to welcome Mr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of Palestine, to the Council and to thank Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing on the developments in the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine.

No one can disagree that the Palestinian question is in an extremely critical and historical phase right now. We have seen many years of stalemate and setbacks in the peace process in the Middle East as a result of obstacles erected by the Israeli occupation authorities and their complete lack of political will to allow the Palestinian people to establish their own independent sovereign State.

The situation has further deteriorated with Israel's intensification of settlement activity, particularly its announced intention to construct thousands of settlement units in the E-1 area, north and south of East Jerusalem and in the West Bank, in a way that

would lead to the geographical bisection of the entire West Bank, effectively erasing the possibility of achieving peace. Morocco strongly condemns this Israeli settlement plan and calls on the international community, as represented in the Council, to intervene to put an end to such policies, which, if things remain unchanged in 2013, will effectively make any political solution, including the two-State solution, impossible.

While Israel persists in its settlement activities in Palestinian territory, it prevents Palestinians from building on their own land. It destroys Palestinians' homes, displaces them, and confiscates their land, as we recently saw in Bab Al-Shams and Bab Al-Karamah. East Jerusalem is the primary area targeted by the new settlement plan because of the religious significance it holds for the three religions. The policy is designed to change the demographic and geographic composition of the area and its cultural and religious features in order to isolate it from its natural Palestinian surroundings.

His Majesty the King of Morocco, as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, has called on the Security Council, and especially its influential members, to live up to their responsibility, to take a principled position opposing the desecration of Muslim and Christian religious sites, and to safeguard the people and those sites. Israel should be made to honour international resolutions that declare its actions as null and void.

Palestinians have proven by word and deed their commitment to the peace process and to negotiations to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe that Palestinian reconciliation will bolster the negotiating position of the Palestinian side. Arab countries have reaffirmed that a just and comprehensive peace is an irreplaceable strategic choice. However, experience has shown that the flexibility and commitment shown by the Palestinian side are not reciprocated by the Israeli side. Rather, Israel persists in its settlement activities, its blockade against Gaza and its occupation practices, thereby undermining the comprehensive final solution, which enjoys international support.

The international community must firmly and immediately intervene and reaffirm the need to work for the two-State solution within clear political parameters and a finite timeframe through negotiations between the two parties to reach a settlement, enabling the Palestinian people to establish their own viable, independent State based on the 1967 borders, with East

Jerusalem as its capital, and living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

The economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, as Mr.erry said, continues to deteriorate owing to the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian Authority's growing budget deficit caused by Israel's withholding of tax and customs revenues in response to General Assembly resolution 67/19, which granted Palestine non-member observer status in the United Nations. This jeopardizes the Palestinian Authority's achievements to date. The Gaza Strip continues to suffer an unjust blockade that flagrantly violates international law and international humanitarian law and denies the rights and dignity of more than 1.5 million Palestinians. We call for an end to this condemned blockade, and urge the international community to stop such collective punishment.

The deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel's suffocating grip on its population increase tensions, reduce the chances for peace, and pose unprecedented threats to all peoples of the region, without exception. The situation compels the Council and the Quartet to act immediately to ensure that negotiations towards the establishment of a just and comprehensive solution in the Middle East can resume.

Our focus on the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, arises from our serious concern about the situation. However, that does not mean that we are any less concerned about Syria or Israel's occupation of other Arab territories in the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. We note with the utmost concern the worsening humanitarian conditions in Syria. I would like to express our recognition and appreciation of the initiative of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to hold a donors conference in Kuwait City by the end of the month.

We also commend the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi on behalf of the United Nations and the League of Arab States. We hope that, by the end of the month, the Council will be able to report conditions that are more conducive to ending the armed conflict and to the launching of an inclusive national dialogue aimed at the establishment of a free and democratic society in Syria that guarantees the rights and dignity of all and preserves the national unity and territorial integrity of that brotherly country.

In conclusion, I cannot fail to mention Morocco's condemnation of Israel's policies towards Lebanon. We reiterate our grave concern about the stability, territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty of Lebanon, in particular given the challenges that the region currently faces. We would like to welcome the foresight, wisdom and responsibility of all Lebanese parties that have refrained from taking any action that would exacerbate the situation in the region.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mr. Roberterry for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel for their statements. On the occasion of this debate, my delegation will talk about the Israeli-Palestinian question and the situations in Syria and Lebanon.

As we once again meet to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, my delegation can only express its great concern about the events that continue to take place in the region. As we all know, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to keep the attention of the international community, in particular the Security Council, without achieving tangible progress.

Events with regard to conflict in recent months are perceived differently by the parties involved. We still recall the crisis between Hamas and Israel in the month of November, which led to numerous victims and massive destruction of property. The sense of responsibility that the two parties demonstrated, with the help of friendly countries, in particular Egypt, fortunately make it possible to reach an agreement that put an end to the crisis. My country would once again like to welcome that.

To preserve that peace, the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority must resolve to work towards strengthening mutual trust. While granting Palestine the status of observer State in the United Nations gave rise to the hope within the Palestinian Authority that that would bring about a rapid settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, concerns remain over the definition of the territories comprising the State, dividing Israelis and Palestinians. We note since then the determination to restart building settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In my delegation's view, that threatens to complicate the two-State solution of

Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

Similarly, Hamas, which stands firm in its position of not recognizing the State of Israel, should, in our view, put aside its extremist demands and work towards unity with Fatah, which continues to state its readiness to resume talks with the State of Israel.

In the light of the prevailing situation, my country would like to reiterate that the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires direct negotiations between the two parties. Those negotiations, which had begun but have been suspended for a while, must resume, under the auspices of the Quartet, in the context of establishing the State of Palestine and guaranteeing Israel its security. The international community should help the two parties to resume the negotiations process without preconditions. It can do that by calling for reactivating the Arab Peace Plan, the Madrid principles and the road map, with the support, of course, of States Members of the United Nations that have any influence on the two parties.

In Syria, the situation is becoming increasingly tragic. The violence has spread to all corners of the country, exacerbating the humanitarian situation of the refugees and displaced persons, while the civilian population sees its rights massively violated by belligerents of all sorts. The fact that the number of dead now exceeds 60,000, as has been pointed out, and that the destruction of private and State infrastructure has intensified, while diplomacy has to date not found a solution to the crisis, has only added to our frustration in view of the chaotic situation engulfing Syria brought about by its own population. In view of the evidence, it would be no exaggeration to say that the mission of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, appears destined for the same fate as that of his predecessor.

The Security Council and the international community as a whole have so far remained powerless to end the ongoing tragedy in Syria, which poses a genuine threat to humankind. Nevertheless, we believe that there is still a chance to resolve the conflict. That will necessitate unity and solidarity among the members of the Security Council, in particular the permanent members, to deal with the distressful situation of the Syrian people. In that regard, we welcome the recent initiatives taken by the United States of America and

the Russian Federation, together with the Joint Special Representative, with a view to achieving a satisfactory solution. All things considered, Togo reaffirms its unwavering support for the Joint Special Representative and urges him to continue his efforts with the Council's support, which he has always asked for.

The Security Council, together with the League of Arab States, should redefine the strategies that could assist in resolving the crisis by negotiation. For all of the evidence indicates that a military victory by one of the parties would likely not lead to durable peace and security in Syria. In Togo's view, national dialogue remains necessary in creating a new, peaceful and reconciled Syria.

With regard to Lebanon, my country remains concerned about the current insecurity on the border with Syria and about the repercussions of the war in Syria on that country. That is why we condemn the killings of politicians, military personnel and innocent civilians — all victims of terrorist attacks. Such a climate of insecurity and impunity threatens the country's stability. Togo commends the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to strengthen security for its population and urges the international community, especially the Security Council, to continue to support those efforts.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his briefing. I also welcome Mr. Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, to today's meeting.

I have listened carefully to the statements made by Foreign Minister Malki and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

The question of Palestine has always been at the centre of the Middle East issue. Dialogue and negotiation remain the ultimate solution to the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, Israeli-Palestinian talks have been stalled since 2010. China is gravely concerned about that situation. The continued deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is in the interest of neither side and will not lead to lasting peace in the Middle East. It also contravenes the common aspiration of the international community. The status quo is untenable.

The Middle East peace process must be restarted as soon as possible, in order to achieve the vision of the two-State solution. China welcomes any and all initiatives aimed at restarting the Israeli-Palestinian talks. We hope that the two sides will advance in parallel by adopting practical measures to foster a favourable environment aimed at resuming the talks and making progress at an early date.

China has consistently rejected Israel's settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the West Bank. We are also seriously concerned about Israel's suspension of tax revenue transfers to Palestine. Nevertheless, the problem of settlement activities remains the main obstacle to the resumption of the peace talks. Israel, as the more powerful party to the conflict, should take the initiative to cease its settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories, release detainees and ease the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, in order to eliminate the obstacles and create conditions favourable to the restart of the peace talks.

The international community should base its actions on the ultimate goal of achieving peace and stability in the Middle East, address the question of Israel and Palestine with greater urgency and promote the peace talks more vigorously. China appeals to the Quartet to take substantive action with a view to restarting the peace talks. China also urges all of the parties concerned to demonstrate the necessary political will. In that context, China supports the efforts of the League of Arab States and favours a greater role for the Security Council in settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is China's continued view that all of the parties concerned should settle their disputes through political dialogue based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace in the Middle East, so that Israel and Palestine can eventually live side by side in peace as two States.

China supports the establishment of a sovereign, independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders. Achieving independent statehood is the legitimate right of the Palestinian people and constitutes the foundation and principles of the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel as two States. The granting of observer

State status to Palestine by the General Assembly represented one more step towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

China has always promoted the peace talks in its own way, and has made efforts to advance the Middle East peace process. China would like to work with the parties concerned, together with the international community, and to continue to play a constructive role in achieving comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East region.

China is gravely concerned about the continuing tension in Syria. A political settlement is the only feasible solution to the Syrian issue and reflects the common understanding of the international community as a whole. The current urgent task requires intensifying political mediation efforts and urging all Syrian parties to cease fire and halt the violence with a view to launching a Syrian-led political process as soon as possible. China applauds all efforts aimed at promoting a political solution.

China supports the just and fair mediation efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. We sincerely hope that all of the parties concerned will strive to find a just, peaceful and appropriate solution to the question of Syria based on the final communiqué of the Geneva meeting of the Action Group on Syria (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Kim Sook (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Coordinator Serry for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank Foreign Minister Malki and Ambassador Prozor for their warm words extended to the five new members of the Security Council, including my country.

The relationship between Israel and Palestine is still at the crux of security issues in the Middle East. However, the ongoing situation between Israel and Palestine is much worse than a simple stalemate. During the past few years, regardless of the reason, the two sides have continued to step away from implementing agreements. The violence witnessed in Gaza and in southern Israel in November 2012 was but a manifestation of that persistent feud. My delegation strongly urges both Israel and Palestine to resume direct negotiations as soon as possible. They need to sit down together to talk now. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the recent import of construction materials to the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom

checkpoint for the first time in five years. It serves to improve the living conditions of the people in Gaza. That also means that the ceasefire negotiations behind the scenes are making slow but steady progress. The negotiation process involving Egypt should contribute to building confidence between Israel and the new Egyptian Government, which is necessary to maintain their peace treaty.

On the other hand, increasing tensions and clashes in the West Bank are a worrying sign. It is of serious concern that Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation in the West Bank has continually debilitated since late last year.

My delegation watched the result of yesterday's general election in Israel with great interest. We expect that the new Israeli Government will place its priority on making progress in the Middle East talks and make sincere and serious efforts for the resumption of talks with Palestine. Also, my delegation took note of President Abbas's recent visit to Cairo and hopes that the Palestinian Authority and Hamas will work together towards reconciliation, with a view to creating an environment conducive to peace talks. Unless and until the vision of two States living peacefully side by side is embraced by all of Palestine, our common aspiration to see the State of Palestine thriving in reality will continue to remain elusive.

The Republic of Korea supports the mediation efforts by the Quartet. It was disappointing to have witnessed that little progress was made until, and even after, the deadline set by the Quartet to finalize an agreement. However, the failure to meet the time limit should not be interpreted as an indictment of the Quartet, the role of which should continue to be an integral part of the process. My delegation encourages the Quartet to renew its activities soon, and both Israel and Palestine to fully cooperate with the process.

The Republic of Korea shares with the international community its strong concerns over Israeli settlement activity. Israel, since its announcement to build 3,000 dwellings on the West Bank, including in the E-1 area, has continued to reaffirm its intention to construct additional settlements in Ramat Shlomo and Givat Hamatos. We are deeply concerned that settlements in the area between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim would jeopardize the negotiation process for a two-State solution.

In Syria the bloodshed has now entered its twenty-second month. More than 60,000 people have been killed. There are more than 650,000 refugees and an estimated 4 million people in urgent need of assistance. The Syrian authorities and the opposition groups must stop atrocities against innocent civilians. My delegation reiterates its call for all parties' cooperation for safe, unimpeded and timely humanitarian access to the people in need of help. Those who violate international humanitarian and human rights laws must be brought to justice. In that context, the Republic of Korea supports the referral of the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court.

Edmund Burke once said that all that was necessary for the triumph of evil was that good men do nothing. Continued inaction will not only result in the increase in the tragic statistics, but also fundamentally undermine peace and stability in the whole Middle East region. The deeper the grudges and grievances of Syrians against Syrians grow, the longer bloody vengeance will prevail, even after President Al-Assad steps down. Extremists are the only group that benefits from the prolongation of the conflict.

The increasingly sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict risks spreading beyond its borders. In particular, the domestic politics of Lebanon are seriously affected by the spillover from the Syrian situation. The growing number of refugees is already causing instability in the neighbouring countries. We compliment the efforts of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to continue to open their borders to accommodate Syrian refugees in spite of immense difficulties. In that regard, we hope for a successful donors conference to be held in Kuwait next week.

My delegation firmly supports the mediation efforts of Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and strongly urges all parties to cooperate fully with Mr. Brahimi.

Lastly, we warn the Syrian regime to not use chemical weapons on any occasion. The use of weapons of mass destruction will be the kiss of death for the Syrian regime. Last month at Marrakech, the Republic of Korea recognized the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. We hope that the Syrian National Coalition will begin an inclusive process of political transition with a view to winning the hearts and minds of all Syrian people. The

Republic of Korea will cooperate with other members of the Security Council to overcome its current division so that the Council can translate its Charter obligations into action and restore lasting peace in Syria.

Mr. Sharifov (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to extend to your delegation, Mr. President, our gratitude for having organized this meeting. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, at today's meeting. We would like express our thanks for the statements made by Mr. Malki, Special Coordinator Serry and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

The situation in the Middle East continues to occupy our minds and to challenge our efforts to achieve a just and lasting solution to the persistent security issues in the region. Deeply rooted and often recurring conflicts in the Middle East, together with the new challenges brought about by the wave of transition and changes, require greater involvement and assistance on the part of the international community. Beyond conflict-resolution efforts, helping States to overcome the hardships of transformation processes is another crucial task associated with the region nowadays.

There is no shortcut to success; the road is long and bumpy. However, one should never underestimate the power of faith, allegiance and commitment, which are the staunchest allies to help overcome the trials of history and accomplish hard missions ahead. Nevertheless, however vibrant the discussions, whatever mediation efforts are needed or whatever tailored assistance might be provided by the international community, the key to solving the region's predicament lies in the political will of the leadership of the States of the region and in the cohesion within society. But that in no way absolves the international community, including the Council, of its own responsibility to protect international peace and security and to facilitate the achievement of solutions to conflict situations based on the generally accepted norms and principles of international law.

The state of the Middle East peace process remains worrisome, with no improvement. After the 21 November 2012 ceasefire there was some hope that the parties would make an attempt to move forward to solidify the existing truce and revive the peace process. We lament that that has not happened. It is clear that the longer the phase of no negotiations lasts, the further the parties will drift apart in achieving a solution. Needless to say, the achievement of peace is impossible in the

absence of consistent commitment by the parties. It is also obvious that among the necessary prerequisites for success is the need to ensure that the process and efforts are guided by the normative standards set by the Charter of the United Nations and by the objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement based on international law.

We have repeatedly stated that a lack of agreement on political issues in a situation of armed conflict and military occupation cannot be used as a pretext for disrespecting international law and human rights. Having said that, we want to express our deep concern over the continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The construction of thousands of settlement units throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is inhibiting a negotiated and peaceful solution to the conflict, as well as constituting an infringement on the rights and freedoms of the Palestinians. The recently announced settlement plan envisaging building thousands of homes in the E-1 area will, if implemented, deal a serious blow to hopes to revive the peace process and, ultimately, to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Illegal activities in the occupied territories should not be recognized under any circumstances. It is important that the international community express its strong and unified opposition to the settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory and reiterate that such activity must stop immediately and unconditionally. It is essential to underline once again that in assuming its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council must take all the necessary measures to ensure that international law, human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected at all times and without preconditions. Regional and international efforts directed towards finding a solution to this conflict, particularly those of the League of Arab States, should be commended and supported. In that regard, we welcome the convening on 9 December of the ministerial meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee in Doha, which also called for resuming negotiations between the parties.

It is also important to take full advantage of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity by promoting inter-communal dialogue and reconciliation,

while categorically rejecting and invalidating any manifestation of ethnic or religious intolerance. The humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza demands continued international attention, particularly in order to ensure the unimpeded provision of humanitarian aid throughout the region for alleviating the suffering of people in need. In that regard, we would like to announce a recent financial contribution made by the Government of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the purposes of emergency assistance in Gaza.

In conclusion, we would like once again to express our firm conviction that peace and security in the Middle East is achievable with greater political will, rigorous work and the concerted efforts of the nation, the region and the international community.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I thank Mr. Robert Serry for his detailed briefing this morning. We also welcome the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine, His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, who has come to New York especially to attend this meeting of the Security Council.

In the past quarter, two significant developments took place. Following a spiral of violence in November, a ceasefire was agreed on between Hamas and Israel. The ceasefire is generally holding. Sporadic breaches should come to an end. And on 29 November, the General Assembly voted to make Palestine a non-member observer State (General Assembly resolution 67/19). That decision reflected the Palestinian people's greatest aspiration, supported by the vast majority of the General Assembly and the international community.

Regrettably, after that momentous development, two punitive measures were initiated against the State of Palestine by Israel: the announcement of new settlements, including in the E-1 area, and the withholding of tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority. The first measure scuttles a two-State solution; the second debilitates Palestine economically and financially. Both measures must be rolled back. They are not in the interests of regional peace and stability, nor of Israel.

We condemn the Israeli announcement that it will expand settlements. In fact, the international community is against that proposed expansion. Settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory contravenes international law, especially the

Geneva Conventions. The planned settlement in the E-1 area, by connecting earlier illegal settlements with other settlements in and around East Jerusalem, would divide the West Bank into two enclaves and destroy the contiguity of the Palestinian State. It would thus render a two-State solution unworkable. The contiguity of the Palestinian State has been reaffirmed as an integral part of the peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict in the Quartet road map. All States Members of the United Nations, and especially the members of the Quartet, are therefore guarantors of a two-State solution.

World leaders have spoken against planned settlements, but so far there is only negative response from Israel. At the end of last month's consultations on the Middle East, the vast majority of Council members expressed their position on settlements at a press stakeout here. The Quartet, however, chose to remain silent. The year 2013 is crucial. If the relevant actors do not take action now, a two-State solution may not remain viable at all. It is probably the last opportunity for the international community to move towards a lasting resolution of the conflict. Procrastination in pursuing a two-State solution is leading to its erosion. Delay does not mean suspension of activity; it is tantamount to the abdication of responsibility.

We urge both the Quartet and the Security Council to display a sense of urgency. If the Quartet cannot or does not move, countries with interest and influence in the region should act to facilitate a resumption of the peace process, based on the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. A resumption of the peace process, however, should mean action with clear benchmarks and deadlines. A comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be assured without Israel's withdrawal from all occupied lands, including those of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. The Security Council must also ensure and monitor the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), as well as other relevant resolutions. The illegal blockade of Gaza and the collective punishment of its population must cease.

Peace in the Middle East has remained a dream for six decades. A solution based on two States is not an issue for the Palestinians alone. A single State would also mean a demographic imbalance for Israel, as well as continued strife, volatility and suffering. Peace would remain elusive. The best course of action for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict lies in

establishing an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Two States, living side by side in peace and security, is the goal that we ought to pursue single-mindedly.

Let me now turn to Syria. As Syria descends into deeper conflict, racked by internecine violence, the humanitarian crisis there continues to grow exponentially. There are pronouncements and protestations by the international community to the effect that it must respond swiftly to stop the killings and move the Syrian nation — Government and opposition — towards dialogue and a political process. But beyond political rhetoric, there is no progress towards engagement. The only realities are continuing carnage and political stalemate. The Security Council itself remains immobilized.

The Secretary-General and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi have used their political capital and clout to persuade the parties, countries of the region and Council members to evolve a common platform for ending the vicious cycle of violence in Syria. Diplomacy is all about hope, so we must not lose hope. We need a ray of hope, a breakthrough, a process that brings Syria and the region out of this quagmire. The levers for a breakthrough are self-evident.

First, both the Syrian Government and the opposition have to change their mind-set that they can win this bloody war militarily. Secondly, engagement is the only viable path, and it is the only viable option before the parties. They have to move towards each other. They have to move towards common ground. Thirdly, the regional Powers and key Council members need to persuade Damascus and the opposition to renounce violence and come to the negotiating table. In this conflict, the Syrian people as a whole are losing, but nobody is winning. Fourthly, the supply of arms must be stopped forthwith. We know from our recent historical experience that the supply of arms to groups advocating and practising different brands of extremism can have unintended consequences. An apparent quick fix today could be a nightmare for national and international actors tomorrow as multiple regions are plunged into an even greater period of volatility. Fifthly, humanitarian access needs to be improved to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

Finally, we fully support the diplomatic efforts being made by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. We wish him success. We want diplomacy to succeed.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with longer statements are requested to kindly circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): I would like to first thank Mr. Roberterry for his comprehensive briefing. Allow me also to also warmly welcome His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine. We are delighted that Mr. Malki is here today, but we are even more delighted that the name plate of State of Palestine is here for the first time, and here to stay, as an expression of the international will to recognize Palestinian statehood.

Indeed, it is a major leap in the uphill battle of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable national rights. However, we are not even half way there. Palestine could only be granted observer status by virtue of General Assembly resolution 67/19. But like any other peace-loving State, it should be granted full membership in the Organization. Therefore, we truly hope that, sooner rather than later, the Council, based on Article 4 of the Charter of the United Nations, will recommend to the General Assembly the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

Most important, the State of Palestine remains occupied. It is our duty — the duty of the international community — to help it put an end to occupation and to achieve real independence. Then, and only then, can we have a genuine and lasting peace in that part of the world.

You, Mr. President, and your 14 colleagues around this table all know that there is no greater obstacle towards such a noble end than the unrelenting Israeli policy of settlement in the territory occupied since 1967. Time and again, the question of the illegality of settlement activity has been stressed in the Council. I see no need to demonstrate it anew. Yet, for whoever may still have any doubt on the matter, let me only recall that one of the first people to recognize the

illegality of such activity was no one other than Mr. Theodor Meron, a child survivor of the Holocaust who became one of the world's most eminent international jurists and was recently elected President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Mr. Meron was the Legal Counsel of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 1967. He was asked by the Office of Mr. Levy Eshkol, then Prime Minister of Israel, for his opinion on the legality of civilian settlements in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. In a cover note dated September 18, 1967 to the legal memorandum that he submitted on the matter, Mr. Meron summarized his conclusions as follows: "civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention."

In the text of his memorandum, the Legal Counsel of the Israeli Foreign Ministry is unequivocally clear that the Geneva Convention prohibition on the occupying Power to deport or transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupies is a prohibition that is "categorical and not conditional upon the motives for the transfer or its objectives. Its purpose is to prevent settlement in occupied territory of citizens of the occupying state".

There is no need to dwell then any longer on the legal aspect of settlements, I assume. Let me, then, turn to the political effects of settlements and how they prejudice the prospects for peace negotiations. To that effect, most telling is a quote from Amos Elon, the late Israeli journalist, essayist and author, who was referred to in a *New York Times* obituary as a cultural giant who was for many years Israel's "most renowned public intellectual". Stressing how detrimental to the prospects of peace the settlements could be, he wrote in a 19 December 2002 essay in the *New York Review of Books*:

"Imagine the effect on the peace process in Northern Ireland if the British government continued moving thousands of Protestants from Scotland into Ulster and settling them, at government expense, on land confiscated from Irish Catholics."

To help assess the magnitude of the ongoing settlement activity, let me underline here that approvals of settlement plans jumped 300 per cent in 2012, and that, in just one week of December of that year, the Israeli Government pushed forward plans for over 11,000 homes beyond the 1967 border — nearly as many

settler homes as were approved in the previous 10 years combined, as clearly demonstrated by the Israeli Peace Now movement. A copy of the alarming report released by that group one week ago, on 16 January, detailing the record of Prime Minister Netanyahu's Government on settlements over the course of its full term in office, that is from April 2009 to the present, can be found at www.peacenow.org.

Yet, no less alarming than that unprecedented level of settlement activity is the strategic location for the recently approved construction plans. In that regard, the case of the E-1 area is most indicative. According to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, if built, the 3,426 housing units that were approved on 5 December 2012 for the E-1 area

"will exacerbate the isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, will interrupt the territorial contiguity between the northern and southern parts of the West Bank and will create a physical and functional barrier between East Jerusalem and the Palestinian population in adjacent West Bank communities for which the city serves as the main metropolitan and religious centre".

For the Israeli non-governmental organization Terrestrial Jerusalem, E-1

"is not a routine settlement. If built, it is a game-changer, maybe a game-ender. E-1 is the binary settlement. If you support E-1, you cannot possibly be in favour of the two-State solution; if you are in favour of the two-State solution, you must oppose E-1".

For those who brush off criticism of E-1 by insisting that Israel is not pursuing construction and that it is just planning, the non-governmental organization Terrestrial Jerusalem is right to remind us that

"when approved, Israel asserts a plan is 'only planning'; when implemented, 'it is not new'. By now, anyone hearing this refrain should immediately understand: Israeli planning in settlements equals Israeli construction in settlements, sooner rather than later".

Surely the Council will recall that, on 11 January, a group of around 200 young Palestinians set up tents in parts of the E-1 area and announced the establishment of a village dubbed Bab Al-Shams — "Gate of the Sun" — after the novel by the internationally renowned

Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, observing that "the time has now come to change the rules of the game, for us to establish facts on the ground — our own land". Before their eviction two days later by the occupying forces, Khoury addressed them from Beirut with the following words:

"When you built your wonderful village you gave back meaning to meaning. You became the sons of this land and its masters ...

"You are the olives of Palestine that shine under the sun of justice, and as you build your village, the light of freedom flares up with you.

"Light upon light".

Borrowing the words of my fellow countryman, I will conclude by saying that it is also high time for the Council to give meaning to meaning by living up to its responsibilities under the Charter and putting an end by all legal means to the illegal settlement activity in the occupied territory.

The President: There are still a number of speakers on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.



Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6906th meeting

Wednesday, 23 January 2013, 3 p.m.

New York

President: Mr. Masood Khan/Mr. Tarar (Pakistan)

Members:

Argentina	Mr. Oyarzábal
Australia	Mr. White
Azerbaijan	Mrs. Jafarova
China	Mr. Hong Ming
France	Ms. Legendre
Guatemala	Ms. Bolaños Pérez
Luxembourg	Mr. Maes
Morocco	Mr. Erroja
Republic of Korea	Mr. Shin Dong Ik
Russian Federation	Mr. Zhdanov
Rwanda	Mr. Kayinamura
Togo	Mr. M'Beou
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Woodfield
United States of America	Mr. Cenzar

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Nigeria to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (spoke in Arabic): I should like at the outset to welcome the participation in this meeting of His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the observer State of Palestine, following the granting to Palestine of the status of non-member observer State in November. I also thank Mr. Robert Serri for the valuable presentation he gave on the developments that have taken place over the past three months.

(spoke in English)

Important developments have taken place since the last open meeting (see S/PV.6847) to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the issue of Palestine, three months ago.

First, President Obama was re-elected in the first week of November. His election renewed the hope for a fresh and effective engagement by the American Administration towards the peace process in the Middle East.

A week after the American elections, there was a limited escalation in Gaza. Egypt tried to mediate as soon as the escalation started. But before our efforts could bear fruit, they were undermined by the wide-scale Israeli aggression against Gaza that same week. That prompted us to demand the convening of an urgent meeting of the Security Council, on 14 November, to address the deteriorating situation. The Council held a closed meeting (see S/PV.6863) the same day, but was unable to take action. Nevertheless, we pursued our efforts to mediate between Israel and Hamas to stop the violence. We succeeded in reaching an agreement to calm down the situation, on 21 November. It included a number of arrangements aimed at sustaining the

de-escalation. It also included the gradual loosening of the illegal blockade on Gaza and stopping the hostilities from both sides.

On 29 November, the General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to grant Palestine the status of observer State in the General Assembly (resolution 67/19). A total of 138 countries voted in favour and nine voted against; there were 42 abstentions. All of the statements made by States during that historic meeting of the General Assembly (see A/67/PV.44), whether in favour, against or in abstention, explained that they had taken their position in order to promote the peace process in the region.

Before that historic step in the General Assembly, Israel had promised to retaliate. It did deliver on its promise. In the period following the adoption of the resolution, the Israeli Government proceeded with a settlement frenzy in the occupied territories, especially Jerusalem. Fourteen members of the Council have issued separate statements denouncing this policy, which aims at imposing a fait accompli on the ground. Israel also seized the tax revenues of the Palestinian Authority, subjecting it to the threat of a financial collapse.

The Arab Foreign Ministers have met three times to address the situation in Palestine since our last meeting: in November, during the Israeli aggression against Gaza; in December; and in January. They took a number of decisions to condemn the settlement frenzy in the occupied territories and to support the Palestinian Authority and the reconciliation efforts in Palestine. They committed to exerting all efforts to give the peace process a last chance.

Egypt resumed its efforts for reconciliation in Palestine. This month the President of Egypt received the President of the State of Palestine. We also received the leaders of Hamas. Steps are currently being taken for the purpose of reconciliation.

Finally, the Israeli elections took place yesterday. The official results are yet to come, but preliminary results show that the current ruling party is ahead in the exit polls. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister of Israel vowed to continue and expand settlement activity. He reaffirmed on many occasions that Israel had the right to build in East Jerusalem.

In the middle of these important developments, we can identify two positive signs. First, the agreement for

the ceasefire in Gaza is still holding. Measures have been taken on both sides to de-escalate the situation. Arrangements have been made by Israel to loosen the blockade, including the expansion of the fishing area for Palestinians to six miles and limited access for trucks into Gaza.

Secondly, the process of Palestinian reconciliation is slowly resuming. We plan to organize a number of meetings in the near future for the two parties to resolve their differences.

Before our next meeting, three months from now, all of the parties, the international community and the Security Council in particular have to show a concrete engagement to contain the serious potential implications of the collapse of the peace process. Inaction is not an option. Incremental practical steps have to be taken in order to ensure stability in the region and save the peace process.

First, the sponsors of the peace process, including the American Administration, the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and all the parties have to recommit to a serious effort to resume the peace negotiations on the basis of the previously agreed terms of reference, with a view to reaching a final solution that would include the establishment of a Palestinian independent State on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Secondly, all current settlement plans in the occupied territories have to be frozen. No new plans should be approved. The Council should consider taking action in that regard.

Thirdly, reconciliation efforts in Palestine have to be encouraged in a clear and unequivocal way.

Fourthly, the situation on the ground in Palestine has to be improved. That applies to both Gaza and the West Bank. The blockade against Gaza has to be lifted. The financial embargo against the revenues of the Palestinian Authority has to end. The daily violence and abuse against the Palestinians has to stop.

We look forward to the achievement of all, or some, of those steps in the next three months. Meanwhile, Egypt will remain committed to working with all parties towards achieving a just and lasting peace for all the peoples and States of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan): All protocol observed, I wish to concentrate my statement today solely on the critical matter of settlement-building in the occupied Palestinian territories, without prejudice to the deep importance that we attach to the other pressing emergencies in our region, which I will come back to in our next intervention before the Council under this item.

In two days' time, the United Nations will begin marking the anniversary of liberation of Auschwitz and, in doing so, recall one of the grimmest episodes in human existence, when the Nazis, together with their collaborators in occupied Europe, destroyed most of eastern and central Europe's Jewish population, together with a large number of Jews drawn from western Europe, particularly from France, the Netherlands and Belgium.

The industrial annihilation of a people was hitherto unknown to a world that had long grown accustomed to campaigns of persecution and mass killing; we think in this regard of the suffering of indigenous nations, for example. The principal lesson from all those experiences has been clear: once we classify and subordinate others to categories not equal with ourselves, along a value chain not drawn from a universal perspective but defined narrowly by the individual communities themselves, we can easily slip into degrading the other, stigmatize them and blame them for whatever negative circumstances unfold, ultimately launching ourselves towards outcomes otherwise thought impossible and which became more possible with every curse.

The Arab-Israeli peace process has reached a crucial point, and the Council over the coming year will be the known to future generations as either the Council that presided over the end of one of the longest conflicts on its agenda, with the birth of a comprehensive settlement based on two States existing side by side in peace and security, or the Council that presided over more ignominious outcome: the burial of peace and the ruin of those living in the region.

We must now therefore do all we can to arrest any development affecting negatively the prospects of the relaunching of the final status negotiations. But we can hardly stitch a credible international effort together, with the fine adjustments it requires, if every week we are being buffeted by news of planned or new Israeli settlement activity, particularly were it to be in occupied East Jerusalem, or in E-1, which

denies the Palestinians contiguity and will doom peace for good. What is particularly vexing is that the law on this issue remains unaltered and abundantly clear, notwithstanding whatever decisions the Supreme Court of Israel may choose to take.

The applicable law in respect of the exercise by Israel of military control over the occupied State of Palestine is, once again, neither Israeli law nor whatever domestic law Israel sees fit to impose, but international humanitarian law, applicable to all high contracting parties as well as obligations that are *erga omnes*. Israel's administrative and military regulations, insofar as the West Bank is concerned, can be lawful only if they are utterly consistent with the Fourth Geneva Convention and its control guided strictly by its obligations as the occupying Power.

The International Court of Justice's position on this last point is crystal clear. It maintained in paragraph 78 of its 2004 advisory opinion that:

"The territories situated between the Green Line [...] and the former eastern boundary of Palestine under the Mandate were occupied by Israel in 1967 during the armed conflict between Israel and Jordan. Under customary international law, these were therefore occupied territories in which Israel had the status of occupying Power. Subsequent events in these territories [...] have done nothing to alter this situation. All these territories (including East Jerusalem) remain occupied territories and Israel has continued to have the status of occupying Power." (see A/ES-10/273)

It is also worth noting that there are no territorial exceptions to this finding. All the territory of the West Bank, as described by the International Court of Justice, is considered occupied. A closer reading of resolution 242 (1967) also bears this point out, as we explained before the International Court of Justice on 24 February 2004. In his oral submission, the late Sir Arthur Watts, Q.C., Counsel for Jordan, noted how resolution 242 (1967)

"affirmed, unanimously, the principle of Israel's withdrawal of its armed forces 'from territories occupied in the recent conflict' — and that meant, and could only mean, territories on the non-Israeli side of the Green Line. Thus the Green Line is the starting line from which is measured the extent of Israel's occupation of non-Israeli territory; originating in 1949 as an armistice line, it became

in 1967 the line to the Israeli side of which Israel had to withdraw its forces, and on the non-Israeli side of which territory was 'occupied' by Israel."

The transfer by the occupying Power of parts of its own population into the territory it occupies represents a clear and continuing serious violation of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, as codified by article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and which is also defined as a criminal act in article 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute.

For those on the more extreme Israeli right who seem to be largely unaware of this last point, or are aware and do not much care, it is worth repeating again that in respect of the Rome Statute, and pending the Court's application of its jurisdiction over Palestine, which is something that may now become possible, we may move beyond simply State responsibility and cross into the domain of individual criminal liability.

The actions of the Israeli settler movement in the occupied Palestinian territories must, for obvious reasons, now stop, and the deep suffering of the Palestinian people must be brought to an end. The actions of States must be guided by customary international law, which this Council itself must uphold and not undermine.

Moreover, our deep opposition to the policy of settlement building and our repeated condemnation of it, which we reiterate today, are not founded on some form of bigotry toward the Jewish people. What they are built on is a continuing, three-decade-long violation of international humanitarian law, confirmed by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of 2004 and understood as such by the vast majority of States existing in the world today.

Finally, we hope that the international community will be seized by the urgency of these delicate moments to create the necessary conditions for the resumption of the final status talks, within which the final shape of the borders will no doubt be dealt with early. In this vein, it is also worth recalling how, in negotiating the draft for what became resolution 242 (1967), the understanding reached between the principal interlocutors was for a withdrawal from all non-Israeli territory, with only minor reciprocal border rectifications.

Ultimately, our hope is to see the occupation of all Arab lands ended fully, for the Palestinians to live free in their new State and, 68 years after the Holocaust,

for the Israelis to feel secure, with all of us in the region working together in the shade of a permanent comprehensive peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Ribeiro Viotti (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing. Brazil appreciates the participation of Minister Riad Malki and the contribution of the Permanent Representative of Israel.

As this is the first open debate on this issue since the historical adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 67/19, let me reiterate Brazil's great satisfaction at the unequivocal support of the international community for the Palestinian request for observer State status in the United Nations. Brazil congratulates the people and the Government of the State of Palestine on that development, which we believe will reinforce the path towards a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

As we begin another year, prospects for peace in the Middle East seem to be growing increasingly remote. The passing of time has only added new complexities to the situation and intensified the need for diplomatic efforts towards sustainable solutions for new and long-standing challenges.

The international community is, unfortunately, still failing to effectively assist with solutions to the most important political problems affecting the region. The Council would, in this regard, set a meaningful example by displaying a stronger determination to seriously deal with this issue through sustained, regular debate.

Throughout 2012, the window for a two-State solution continued to narrow, and more people in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and southern Israel continued to suffer the consequences of inaction.

The situation has been further aggravated by the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That illegal practice remains a serious obstacle to peace in the region and to the realization of the two-State solution. The construction of Israeli settlements in the so-called E-1 area and other recent settlement construction in the Palestinian occupied territory are of particular concern. Israel should

reconsider its decision. Such activity undermines the prospects for a two-State solution, is illegal under international law and constitutes a major obstacle to peace. Not only must Israeli settlement construction be completely frozen; settlements must be dismantled and the occupation must end.

Progress is urgently needed in 2013. The international community has long been in possession of the blueprint for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The essential missing element is the political resolve to apply it through a reliable process.

Brazil reiterates its call on the Security Council to fully carry out its responsibilities. The promotion of peace in the Middle East is in the interest of all members of the United Nations and cannot be delegated to third parties. As stated previously by my Government, an inoperative Quartet and a silent Security Council do not serve the interests of peace in the Middle East.

The recent conflict in Gaza was yet another reminder of the human, political and material costs of the indefinite protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the paralysis of the peace process.

The Brazilian Government protests in the strongest terms the destruction by Israeli forces, during the most recent conflict in Gaza, of the Al Sikka bridge serving the inhabitants of Moghraqa, Wadi Gaza village, Buriej and Nuseirat, which had recently been rebuilt by the United Nations Development Programme with Brazilian funds. It is simply unacceptable that the civilian population should pay the price.

It is positive that the ceasefire agreed upon by the parties was upheld. Human life must be equally protected, be it in Gaza City or in Sderot. A sustainable solution for this issue involves the repudiation of violence and extremism by all actors, Palestinian reconciliation, the end of the Gaza blockade and the resumption of the peace process.

Concerning Syria, we are appalled by the current level of violence against civilians. We have strongly condemned the attack at Aleppo University. Brazil reiterates the need for an independent investigation to identify those responsible for that act and bring them to justice. We are also concerned by the situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. Brazil has contributed to the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in order to diminish their suffering.

Violence in Syria compromises the future of the country, yet both the Government and the opposition continue to disregard the imperative for a negotiated solution and to wrongly believe that they can prevail by military means. The primary responsibility for the cessation of violence certainly lies with the Syrian Government, but we are also aware of the responsibilities of the armed opposition groups and of the presence of radical elements among the rebels.

All parties must fulfil their obligations to halt violence and respect international humanitarian law, as well as actively engage in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. The international consensus is that there is no military solution to the conflict. The only path forward is through an inclusive Syrian-led political process.

At the present juncture, support for the work of the Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, is even more important. Brazil calls on all actors, including the Security Council, to redouble their efforts to find a multilaterally agreed solution to the crisis, as provided for in the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex), which retains its relevance today as a consensus document. Efforts must concentrate on the need to end bloodshed immediately, to promote stability and to help the parties to negotiate in good faith.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. It is an issue of great importance to regional and international peace and security, especially in the circumstances currently prevailing in the Middle East.

At the outset, I would like to confirm our endorsement of the statements that have been and will be made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement. I also salute the presence among us of the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine and his participation in this meeting, and I thank Mr. Roberterry for his comprehensive briefing.

The Palestinian cause has witnessed important developments since the last Council debate on the issue (see S/PV.6847). Through its resolution 67/19, adopted

on 29 November 2012, the General Assembly granted Palestine the status of a non-member observer State of the United Nations. After the adoption of that resolution, Israel started expanding settlements and increasing the number of residential units in existing ones. In his briefing to the Council last month (see S/PV.6894), the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs noted Israel's announcement in the wakes of that adoption that it would continue planning for the construction of thousands of residential units in the area between Jerusalem and the Ma'ale Adumim settlement. He went on to say that the Israeli Government had decided to speed up the construction of approximately 6,500 residential units in East Jerusalem. That was the Israeli Government's response to resolution 67/19.

As another means of punishing the Palestinian people, Israel refused to pay the tax and customs revenues due to the Palestinian Authority. That is a violation of the Paris Protocol, which stipulates that tax revenues must be transferred. To alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia gave budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority in the amount of \$100 million. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land has become one of the longest-standing occupation issues that this Organization has dealt with. We hear statements in this and other bodies expressing the strong belief on the part of the international community and the United Nations in the justice of the Palestinian cause and the inevitability of putting an end to their plight. However, practically speaking, the Council is paralysed and helpless because the occupying Power continues to disregard the international community and carry on with its brutal and unjust policies.

In his most recent report on the situation in the Middle East (S/2012/701), the Secretary-General states that settlement expansion undermines the territorial basis for a future Palestinian State. The settlements incontrovertibly violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, which forbids occupying Powers to change the demographics of the land or to confiscate territory. The settlements deal a death blow to the possibility of a peaceful settlement to the Palestinian question based on the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as the guardian of Islamic holy sites, is deeply concerned about the Israeli practices in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Security Council and the General Assembly have adopted over

10 resolutions pertaining to Jerusalem and the need to avoid any negative impact on its religious and spiritual significance. Nevertheless, over half of Israeli settlers live in the area of Jerusalem and its environs, and increasingly in the area between southern Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The most recent resolution on Jerusalem was Assembly resolution 67/24, adopted on 30 October 2012 and entitled "Jerusalem". Its first paragraph states that any measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws and sovereignty are illegal and null and void and lack all legitimacy.

Israel continues its campaign of demolition in the area surrounding the holy sites in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, both above ground and especially under and around the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, in an effort to weaken its foundation, which would lead to its eventual collapse. The excavations around Al-Aqsa Mosque have increased to almost 30 locations. Meanwhile, Israel continues to demolish the homes of Palestinian Jerusalemites and to cancel their residency rights, continuing to evict many Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem, leaving them homeless.

That is without even mentioning the behaviour of Israeli settlers in the city who commit provocations, including damaging and desecrating mosques and churches. The Council is obligated to compel Israel to cease its current policies and abide by Council and Assembly resolutions. The time has come to do away with the permanent immunity that Israel has enjoyed, to take the measures necessary to guarantee the independence of the State of Palestine, and to put an end to the occupation of its territories. The occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan and the Shab'a farms and other Lebanese territories, must also come to an end. Failure to act will deeply hurt the credibility and stature of the United Nations and the Security Council.

The tragic situation in Syria has recently taken a serious turn for the worse, with increased killings from air raids conducted by the Syrian Government against its own citizens. It has come to the point of treating its citizens as enemies, killing them and destroying their homes. The number of victims is now more than 60,000, while the number of refugees and internally displaced persons is in the millions.

Everyone can see that the Syrian regime has lost its legitimacy and can no longer remain in power. It fights to the very end in order to cling to its vanishing authority. It seeks to portray the situation as a dispute

between that country and its neighbours, while in fact its people have risen in revolt and have clearly expressed their will, which must be respected. Its clinging to power over the corpses of martyrs cannot continue. Threatening to destroy Damascus so that it collapses around its people is only a sign of despair and bankruptcy.

The Syrian people feel bitter about the international community's lack of action and at the fact that the Security Council has abandoned them. The Council has to date been unable to stop the Government killing machine. Instead, the killing machine has grown stronger and broadened its scope, committing crimes against humanity and horrendous massacres. My country therefore demands that all perpetrators of those crimes be held accountable before international justice. It calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities in that regard.

As it notes with distress the events in Syria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not hesitated to shoulder its responsibility by coming to the help of the Syrian people and providing humanitarian assistance and relief aid to the tune of several hundreds of millions of dollars. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will actively participate in the donor conference called for by the Secretary-General, to be held at the end of this month in the State of Kuwait, in order to meet the needs of the Syrian people.

Moreover, the Kingdom was among the first countries to recognize the Syrian National Coalition, recognized to date by more than one hundred States. The Coalition must therefore now be given the opportunity to represent the Syrian people in all organizations, bodies and forums. That position of Saudi Arabia stems from its great grief and sadness at the events we witness daily — the killing, destruction and genocide committed by the regime against unarmed civilians.

Our country notes that the Security Council has been very slow to take action in response to the tragic situation in Syria and to assume its humanitarian, moral and regional responsibilities. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia urges the Council to respond to the appeals of the Syrian people and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We call on the Council to promptly act with resolve under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in order to put an end to the killing being perpetrated by the Syrian regime. We urge it to work towards achieving a real and

peaceful transfer of power that meets the aspirations and expectations of the Syrian people for freedom, dignity and prosperity and that preserves the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, while respecting the diversity of its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): At the outset, I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, and to your country, Pakistan, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. On a similar note, I wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statements to be made by the representatives of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In November last year, we witnessed the will of the international community when the General Assembly granted Palestine non-member observer State status (resolution 67/19). While we rejoice at that development, we condemn the racist and uncivilized actions of Israel in relation to that event since then. Israel has continued its expansionist policy by approving new illegal settlements in the West Bank and in the E-1 area close to East Jerusalem. On 8 January, Prime Minister Netanyahu claimed that Israel's construction and expansion of those illegal settlements do not pose any threat to the peace process. That is absurd and preposterous. That move by Israel is clear proof that it views international law and world opinion with disdain. What is more apparent is that Israel is not interested in peace. My delegation believes that the further expansion of illegal settlements will scuttle the two-State solution.

Israel continues to illegally alter the reality on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory. It seems adamant in destroying the will of the Palestinians to govern themselves. Israel's seizure of Palestinian tax revenues is not only unlawful and shameful, but is another act of atrocity aimed at weakening and punishing the Palestinian National Authority. The world cannot turn a blind eye to those illegal actions by Israel. Major Powers should prove to the world that their foreign policy and actions on the issue of Palestine are decided in their capitals, not in Tel Aviv.

Israel must be made to realize that its future and its security lie within the principles of the establishment of a Palestinian State under the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must also cease all illegal settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian structures, which are in violation of international law. It must be forced to respect and restore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Israel must heed international calls to lift the illegal blockade on Gaza immediately. Only then can Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace and security.

The impasse in the Middle East is not impossible to resolve, but we need pragmatic solutions based on international principles and norms. It requires all influential Powers to display strong political leadership in considering the mutually reinforcing needs of the peoples and nations in the region. It goes without saying that the Security Council must play its intended role by fulfilling its mandate to enforce its resolutions in pursuit of a sustainable solution to the question of Palestine, thus restoring its credibility. We must collectively pledge such efforts in order to rid the world of insecurity and conflict and to replace them with sustainable peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) (spoke in Arabic): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your outstanding leadership of the presidency of the Council this month. I thank Morocco for its stewardship of the Council last month. I also wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his detailed briefing this morning. I welcome the presence of the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine and his participation in this meeting. I would like to welcome the new Council members and pay tribute to the outgoing members.

This is the first debate of 2013 on this issue. The Group of Arab States would therefore like to reaffirm the fact that 2013 will be a decisive turning point with regard to the Middle East, in particular the Palestinian question, which is the primary cause of the Arab world. On 29 November 2012, we witnessed the historic granting to Palestine of non-member observer State status in the United Nations. It is the first major individual achievement in many years on the path to lasting and comprehensive peace and the two-State solution. It is particularly important at a time

when the international community has demonstrated its incapacity to compel the occupying Power, Israel, to respect the unanimous will of the international community and to end the occupation of Palestine through ensuring the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council.

It is unacceptable that, to date, the international community has continued to adopt the same approach of many decades in addressing the Palestinian question. It is high time for the world, through the United Nations and particularly the Security Council, to assume its direct responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security, particularly since Israel has continued to occupy Arab and Palestinian lands and to maintain its illegal and illicit activities in blatant violation of all international laws and instruments, including the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

In that context, the deliberate violations carried out by the Israeli Government have escalated, as if Israel is attempting to further punish the Palestinian people and their leaders in view of their diplomatic, political and legal successes at the multilateral level that have promoted Palestine to the rank of observer State to the United Nations.

The escalation of activity, including settlement construction, led to the Israeli Government's announcement of three thousand additional units to be built in Palestinian territory, namely, East Jerusalem, and the completion of the so-called E-1 settlement complex, which would isolate East Jerusalem, separate it from the West Bank and cut the geographic link between the north and the south of the West Bank. That is an additional threat made by the State of Israel, and it highlights the illegitimacy of its settlement activities. It also represents a major obstacle to the achievement of a solution based on two States living side by side within the pre-1967 borders.

Unsatisfied with their actions so far, Israeli forces also savagely acted against Palestinian activists who were demonstrating against Israeli expansionist policies and peacefully attempting to protect their land by setting up Palestinian villages that they call Bab al-Shams and Bab al-Karamah.

We vehemently condemn the continuing Israeli violations against the Palestinian people and their land.

In 2012, the occupying Power killed 226 Palestinians, including more than 60 women and children, and injured 2,300. It also destroyed 2,100 homes and facilities and uprooted more than seven thousand fruit trees, and authorized the construction of 26,000 new housing units. Israel must realize that its continuing crimes will have negative consequences and that those who perpetrate the crimes will not escape from justice.

Israel must be held responsible for the health of all of the Palestinian detainees and prisoners, given that its detention policy spares no sector of Palestinian society.

The Arab Group also condemns Israel's piracy through its control of Palestine's trade channels and crossings, particularly its refusal to transfer tax and customs revenues to the Palestinians. That revenue is fundamentally important to the economy of the State of Palestine, which has already suffered serious challenges due to Israeli policies limiting the movement of goods and individuals both inside and outside of Palestine. Beyond the piracy implications, the Palestinian Authority faces difficulty in paying the salaries of its civil servants, which has affected the interests of about 1 million Palestinian citizens. From the viewpoint of the Arab Group, we call upon the international community to take immediate action to compel Israel to release the Palestinian tax revenues and to refrain from such illegitimate and immoral practices.

The Arab Group welcomes the positive signs that have emerged from the meetings recently held in Cairo, with the aim of accelerating reconciliation between the Palestinian factions. The Arab Group welcomes, in this context, the great efforts of Cairo and the Arab League towards Palestinian reconciliation, which is an Arab priority.

Arab and Palestinian hands are fully extended to ensure a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two States — an independent State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, alongside the State of Israel, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israel has continued to play its role as the occupying Power and to demonstrate its arrogance in the region. It has preferred that role, rather than a role aimed at establishing natural and normal relations with neighbouring States. Yesterday parliamentary elections took place in Israel. During the campaign, we heard

the negative slogans of a number of parties. Therefore, we must tirelessly continue our efforts to end Israeli violations of international law in order to achieve peace in the region.

All efforts could be undermined if Israel continues to violate international law and to hamper international Arab efforts to achieve peace, as it has continued to do in recent years. We therefore call upon the international community to take immediate action in proposing a serious initiative with an established deadline and time frame for all parties, aimed at achieving two States in line with international legitimacy and with the peace process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): First of all, Mr. President, on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, your able team and your country on the excellent conduct in steering the work of the Council for the month.

Amid a rapidly changing situation in the Middle East, the Palestinian question remains at the heart of the outstanding issues that require the utmost attention of and prompt intervention from this body, which has so far failed to address and correct the injustices that Israel has been inflicting on the Palestinian people from 1948 until today. The Palestinian people's aspirations to realize their legitimate dreams and rights to freedom, sovereignty and self-determination and to practice the principles of equity, justice and human dignity in their own independent State on their own homeland, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, are systematically blocked and denied. Their long-standing question is still unresolved and peace and justice are unsecured, and the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is ultimately made permanent.

After 20 years of painful, tortuous and often futile negotiations, prospects for peace and justice in the region are now diminishing more rapidly than ever. Indeed, Israel's occupation policies and practices continue to undermine the vision of the two-State solution and to defy the will of the international community through settlement, construction, land annexation, appropriation of properties, isolation of East Jerusalem from the Palestinian territory, and so

on, all in violation of international law and relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Indeed, it would be hard not to notice the emergence and proliferation of parties in Israel with hard-line positions and the primary goal of supporting settlements and not making peace with the Palestinians, thus leaving the fate of Palestinian statehood hanging in the balance. Definitely, while Israeli settlement policies constitute a standing challenge, the current stalemate in the peace process is neither acceptable nor conducive to a just and lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Meanwhile, the recognition and upgrading of Palestine status to non-member observer State at the United Nations constitutes a timely and fundamental opportunity that should not be lost but rather fully utilized to create a new momentum for reviving the currently deadlocked peace process and to create genuine progress in the pursuit of a just and durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one that will lead to the comprehensive realization of the independence of the State of Palestine on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The realization of peace and stability in the Middle East is an utmost priority for the OIC and the international community alike, given that a credible political process, to which the OIC remains committed, is of strategic significance to the entire region and beyond. Therefore, the OIC remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must not be absolved of its role and duties under the Charter of the United Nations to take necessary and immediate actions to ensure that Israel halts its occupation and settlement policies, so as to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in line with United Nations resolutions and international law, and eventually to maintain the internationally endorsed two-State solution.

Our debate today coincides with the most intense and aggressive Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem in particular, where Israel continues to pursue a systematic process of altering the city's indigenous demographic composition and character and creating facts on the ground. Israeli policies are designed to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian environs, in defiance of the unanimity of the international stance, United Nations resolutions

and international law. At this crucial phase, there must be continued economic, financial and political support for the Palestinian people with a view to enhancing the sustainability, viability and existence of the Palestinian State, which faces dire financial challenges due to arbitrary Israeli measures and illegal withholding of Palestinian revenues.

The OIC will continue to stress that resolving the Middle East conflict hinges on a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. The international consensus to realize the vision of the two-State solution requires a clear stance based on international legality and justice. There must also be full acknowledgement of and respect for historical commitments and pledges made in that regard, as embodied in relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): I would like to thank Pakistan for convening this open debate. I also wish to express appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing.

Japan has long understood the Palestinians' aspiration to build an independent State and has supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Japan thus endorses a two-State solution under which Israel and a future independent Palestinian State would coexist side by side in peace and security. In light of that, last November Japan voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 67/19, regarding the status of Palestine at the United Nations, and welcomes the fact that the resolution was adopted with the support of a large number of Member States.

Palestine now bears greater responsibilities vis-à-vis the international community. Japan once again calls upon Palestine not to use the non-member observer State status accorded by the General Assembly resolution to act in a way that might negatively affect or hinder direct negotiations with Israel. We ask for prudence with respect to its conduct, such as applying for membership in international organizations — an action that might negatively affect prospects for the resumption of negotiations.

As for the situation in Gaza, we welcome the fact that the calm brokered by Egypt in November has largely held so far. We urge all parties concerned to continue to respect the ceasefire with a view to

realizing a durable calm in Gaza. We also encourage tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, while rejecting any attempt to promote violence or to deny Israel's right to exist.

It is regrettable that negotiations between the parties remain stalled, putting in danger the prospect for a two-State solution. Japan requests both Palestine and Israel to establish relationships of mutual trust and to promptly return to the negotiation table. Japan will continue to actively contribute to moving the Middle East peace process forward, in cooperation with the United States, Arab countries, the Quartet and other partners.

In that context, we deeply deplore that, after the adoption of the General Assembly resolution, the Israeli Government announced its approval of the large-scale construction of housing units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Settlement activities need to be frozen, as they are a violation of international law. Japan is also worried about a temporary suspension of the transfer of tax revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Support for the fiscal stability of the Palestinian Authority is a necessary task that Israel should carry out. We strongly hope that following Israel's national elections yesterday, the new Government to be formed will create conditions for a resumption of meaningful peace negotiations by rescinding those decisions, which are only exacerbating tensions between the parties.

With respect to assistance to Palestine, Japan, together with Palestine, will hold a conference on cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian development in February in Tokyo. Japan will thus contribute to promoting assistance to the Palestinians in cooperation with other East Asian countries.

Addressing the issues of Palestinian refugees is also of critical importance. Bearing in mind the crucial role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays in this matter, since last November Japan has extended to it another \$10 million in assistance, including \$7.7 million in food aid. Japan remains firmly committed to making substantial contributions to support UNRWA activities.

Allow me now to touch upon Syria. Japan is deeply concerned by the serious and worsening situation in Syria and profoundly deplores the death of many thousands of people as a result of continued violence. An attack against the University of Aleppo last week is

further tragic testimony to that. As an active member of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People, Japan reiterates its call on all parties in Syria to immediately halt the violence and abuses of human rights, and condemns the Syrian authorities for not keeping their own commitments and responsibilities to protect their own citizens. We support the diplomatic efforts of Mr. Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, and once again emphasize the importance of advancing the process of a Syrian-led political transition.

Faced with this appalling situation, we cannot remain mere spectators. Last week, on Switzerland's initiative, 57 countries, including Japan, jointly sent a letter to the President of the Security Council, requesting that the situation in Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court (S/2013/19, annex). We call on the Council to duly recognize the importance of ensuring accountability for crimes committed on the ground, and to send an unequivocal message demanding that international human rights and humanitarian law be observed by the Syrian authorities and all other parties.

With the harsh winter inflicting tremendous suffering on a growing number of refugees on the ground, there is an urgent need to address the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. Japan commends the Secretary-General's initiative to convene a high-level international humanitarian pledging conference for Syria, to be held on 30 January in Kuwait City. The Government of Japan intends to dispatch a senior-level delegation from the capital with a view to making a significant contribution to international efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Pakistan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and on organizing today's debate, focusing on the centrality of peace in the Middle East, not only for the peoples of the region but also for the international community. I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for inviting the Holy See to take the floor in this important debate.

The Holy See has actively and attentively followed the steps leading to Palestine's new status at the United Nations as a non-member observer State, and welcomes

General Assembly resolution 67/19, while noting that such an outcome does not in itself constitute a solution adequate to the problems in the region. It remains a matter of deep concern to my delegation that the international community has failed to engage the Israelis and Palestinians in significant, substantive dialogue and dispute resolution so as to bring stability and peace to both. Solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the key to a series of questions affecting the region more broadly, not to mention the consequences for the wider world. The Holy See therefore aligns itself with other delegations in calling for a resumption of the peace process and a commitment by all parties to a peaceful resolution of their disputes.

On 15 May 2009, at the conclusion of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Pope Benedict XVI passionately expressed the following sentiments, which have a substantive bearing on our work:

"No more bloodshed! No more fighting! No more terrorism! No more war! Instead, let us break the vicious circle of violence. Let there be lasting peace based on justice; let there be genuine reconciliation and healing. Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders. Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign, independent homeland, to live with dignity and to travel freely. Let the two-State solution become a reality, not remain a dream."

The Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, speaking before the General Assembly in 2011, expressed the hope that the competent bodies of the United Nations would strive to give concrete implementation to that goal (see A/66/PV.28). Today the Holy See vigorously renews that essential plea and the wisdom underlying the need for a commitment to dialogue as an antidote to the violence that continues to destabilize this region.

At various times, the Holy See has invited the leaders of the two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, who have suffered so much, and of those nations that have a particular responsibility in the region, to do all they can to restart and reinvigorate the negotiations in good faith, and to avoid actions, such as making conditions, that contradict declarations of goodwill and the sincere search for meaningful solutions that can ensure a secure foundation for peace for these great peoples. Real peace

in the Middle East will come only as a result of mutual understanding and respect among all the peoples of the region, Jews, Christians and Muslims. Peace requires courageous decisions and unwavering commitments.

The international community, together with the Quartet, which has been involved in the Middle East peace process, must demonstrate leadership in bringing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) to a successful conclusion, because that document is the juridical basis for the existence of two States. Like other members of the international community, and in full support of the role and efforts of the larger family of nations in helping to resolve the crisis in the Middle East, the Holy See is convinced that the ongoing crisis will be resolved only when respect for justice and the legitimate aspirations of the two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, are preserved and guaranteed by them and by the international community at large.

In the hope that the problems caused by the many conflicts of the region will finally be resolved through good-faith negotiations, respectful dialogue and equitable compromise, the Holy See further underlines that a lasting solution must include a decision on the status of the holy city of Jerusalem and its internationally guaranteed protection, essential to the patrimony of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As Pope Benedict XVI recently stated in his address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Jerusalem must be an element of peace and unity for the peoples of the world and therefore never a source of division. The Holy See hereby renews its support for internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure freedom of religion and of conscience for its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places for the faithful of all religions and nationalities.

Moreover, let us not forget that resolution 181 (II) foresaw a special international status for the city of Jerusalem and its environs, to be administered by the Trusteeship Council. We know that similar ideas have recently been put forward by some of the parties, in the context of peace discussions, and we sincerely hope that they will be pursued. Indeed, the only way to resolve the delicate issue of Jerusalem in a definitive, just and lasting way, as well as to secure the guaranteed provisions for freedom of religion and access to the holy places called for at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and in other resolutions, might be to involve the United Nations in the holy city's

safekeeping and administration in some relevant and effective capacity.

Turning to the sad events in Syria, the Holy See is deeply concerned about the worsening situation and the humanitarian aspects of the crisis. The Holy See has reiterated several times that a military solution to the Syrian crisis is untenable. My delegation joins with those who urge the parties concerned, for the same love of that people they wish to protect, to end the violence and bloodshed and to come to the negotiating table, under the auspices of the international community, in order to begin a transition towards a peaceful civil society, with no discrimination based on ethnicity or belief, and respectful of its long history of peaceful coexistence among its diverse religions, ethnicities and cultures.

In fact, the Holy Land and the entire Middle East are characterized by the presence of this mosaic of different cultures, languages, religions and confessions, which bestows such an enviable pride of beauty on their history and their contributions to the enduring civilizations of the world. The bimillenary presence of Christians in those lands is a factor of richness that must be respected, promoted and preserved. It is a matter of fundamental rights rooted in the very essence of that ancient civilization, which must be duly protected by the respective Governments — and we welcome here their attention so far accorded to that issue — and supported by the international community.

The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's message for this year's International Day of Peace refers to Jesus' words, "Blessed are the peacemakers". Allow me therefore to conclude by recalling the Pope's address here before the Council, so that all who are responsible for the well-being of the peoples of the Middle East may listen and reflect on that message, because every action intended to hasten the realization of peace will constitute a legacy that ennoble the name of all peacemakers, for they are the human guarantors of that which dignifies the human person and the family of nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vraïlas: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential

candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, the European Union firmly believes that now is the time to take bold and concrete steps towards peace. The parties must engage in direct and substantial negotiations without preconditions in order to achieve a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ending all claims. The European Union underlines the urgency of renewed, structured and substantial peace efforts in 2013, and towards that end it is ready to work with the new United States Administration and other international partners, including within the Quartet.

There will be no sustainable peace until the Palestinians' aspirations to statehood and sovereignty and those of Israelis to security are fulfilled through a comprehensive negotiated peace, based on the two-State solution. The viability of a two-State solution must be maintained. The European Union expresses deep concern about developments on the ground that threaten to make a two-State solution impossible.

The European Union is deeply dismayed by and strongly opposes Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and in particular Givat Hamatos, and plans to develop the E-1 area. Construction in Givat Hamatos cuts geographic continuity between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The E-1 plan, if implemented, would seriously undermine the prospects of a negotiated resolution of the conflict by jeopardizing the possibility of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State and of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. It could also entail the forced transfer of the civilian population. The European Union reiterates that settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. In the light of its core objective of achieving a two-State solution, the European Union will closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and act accordingly.

As we have stated before, the European Union will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by the parties. The European Union also believes that the following further parameters could serve as a basis for a resumption of negotiations: first, security arrangements that, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty and show that the occupation is over, and, for Israelis, protect their security, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and deal effectively with new and emerging threats; secondly, a just, fair and

agreed solution to the refugee question; and, thirdly, the fulfilment of the aspirations of both parties concerning Jerusalem. A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

The setting up of an internationally supported framework for direct negotiations between the parties would be instrumental in the resumption of such negotiations. The European Union remains in close contact with the parties and with the Union's partners within the Quartet, as well as with other key actors, with the clear aim of achieving significant progress as soon as possible.

The European Union recalls that the Arab Peace Initiative provides regional support for a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. The European Union will work with those who are willing to join in such a quest for peace, stability and prosperity.

The European Union calls on Israel to resume without delay the transfers of Palestinian tax and clearance revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, and without further interruption, in line with the Paris Protocol. Cuts in those transfers jeopardize the viability of the Palestinian Authority, have a critical impact on the provision of basic services for the Palestinian population, and present a considerable threat to the security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond.

It is of the utmost importance that the Palestinian Authority continue to receive strong political and financial support from the international community as a whole. The European Union recently decided on a front-loading of its budget support to the Palestinian Authority and calls on other donors, in particular Arab countries, to fully honour their commitments.

The European Union calls on the new Israeli Government that will be formed after yesterday's election, as well as on the Palestinian leadership, to reaffirm their commitment to the two-State solution and to engage in direct and substantial negotiations without preconditions.

On 29 November 2012, the General Assembly voted in favour of resolution 67/19 on the granting of non-member observer State status in the United Nations to Palestine. The European Union calls on the Palestinian leadership to use that new status constructively and not to undertake steps that would

deepen the lack of trust and lead further away from a negotiated solution.

Despite the ceasefire, the status quo in the Gaza Strip remains unsustainable. Fully recognizing Israel's legitimate security needs, the European Union reiterates its call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from the Gaza Strip, the situation of which will be unsustainable as long as it remains politically and economically separated from the West Bank. Equally, the issue of illegal weapons transfers into the Gaza Strip has to be effectively addressed as a matter of urgency. It is vital that all parts of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities be implemented and that talks on a durable ceasefire agreement continue.

The European Union commends the efforts of Egypt and all those who engaged in mediation. The European Union is committed to facilitating the social and economic development of the Gaza Strip. The European Union expresses its readiness to make use of its instruments in support of the parties' efforts, including the possible reactivation, in the appropriate way, of the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Rafah. The European Union underlines its readiness to explore further ways to address the situation in the Gaza Strip, including with concerned parties in the region, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

The European Union reiterates its call for intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind the strong leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011, as an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian State and for reaching a two-State solution. It is in the fundamental interest of the European Union to support peace and democracy in the entire region, and a strategic priority to see an end to a conflict that will continue to undermine peace and security along the EU's southern borders as long as it remains unresolved.

The European Union is appalled by the increasingly deteriorating situation in Syria, primarily due to the unprecedented use of force by the regime. It also condemns all attacks, including terrorist acts, that indiscriminately target civilians. The European Union is seriously concerned about the potential use and transfer of chemical weapons in Syria, and reminds the Syrian regime and other parties that, in case of their use, those responsible will be held accountable.

The European Union underlines the necessity of the complete destruction of those chemical weapons at the earliest date practicable, and urges Syria to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention as soon as possible. The European Union remains deeply concerned by the spillover effects of the Syrian crisis in neighbouring countries. It remains committed to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

The European Union reiterates its full support for the efforts undertaken by the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to achieve a Syrian-led peaceful political transition based on the principles included in the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012, and calls on all parties to actively engage with Mr. Brahimi. The European Union continues to call on all members of the Security Council to uphold their responsibilities.

The European Union encourages the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to continue working on its structures, to become more operational and inclusive, and to remain committed to respecting the principles of human rights, inclusiveness and democracy and to engaging with all sections of Syrian civil society. The European Union encourages the Coalition to engage further with the Joint Special Representative, and stands ready to engage with and support the Coalition in those endeavours and its relations with the international community at large.

The European Union reiterates its support for strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations and stresses their importance for the building of the future democratic Syria. It also acknowledges the importance of supporting local civilian structures throughout Syria.

The European Union reiterates its call on all parties to the conflict to facilitate humanitarian access and aid delivery to the people in need, to ensure the neutrality of humanitarian aid, and to strictly abide by international humanitarian law. The pledging conference in Kuwait on 30 January will be an important opportunity. The EU will reaffirm its engagement to the Syrian population in Syria and in neighbouring countries affected by the crisis and that are generously hosting Syrian refugees. The European Union will also call on all donors to step up their response, in coordination with the United Nations and in full respect of humanitarian principles. The overall humanitarian contribution so far from the EU and its member States amounts to over €333 million.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about widespread and systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that, according to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The European Union recalls that all those responsible for such crimes must be held accountable and that there should be no impunity for such violations and abuses. The European Union has repeatedly stated that, if concerns about war crimes and crimes against humanity are not adequately addressed at the national level, the International Criminal Court should deal with the situation. The Security Council can refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, as requested in the Swiss letter to the Security Council of 14 January, at any time (S/2013/19, annex). The European Union calls on the Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in all its aspects, including that issue.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to see Pakistan, one of the founding members of our Committee, holding the presidency of the Security Council this month. Having been elected on many occasions to the Security Council, your country, Mr. President, inspires considerable respect because of its contributions to the work of that body and to the maintenance of peace in general. Allow me also to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his very useful briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

Recently, in October, our Committee and member States warned the Security Council of the dangers of not taking action in the light of the deteriorating situation in Gaza. The conflict in November cost the lives of many people, mostly Palestinians, and caused considerable material damage to that enclave, which is still suffering the impact of the last war. While welcoming the diplomatic efforts of Egypt, the Secretary-General and other global actors, we were concerned about the time the Council took to respond. Pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009), the Council should now take immediate measures to bolster the ceasefire, ensure the protection of civilians and fully lift the blockade that has been imposed by Israel.

The Committee welcomes the historic adoption of resolution 67/19 by the General Assembly, which is the first step towards full recognition of the State of Palestine as a State Member of the United Nations, a matter which is currently before the Council. The resolution has created a new reality that can give new impetus to the peace process and promote respect for international law. During its conferences and meetings in 2013, our Committee will deploy considerable efforts to analyse the resolution's specific impact in legal, political and socioeconomic terms.

The changing situation on the ground is a cause of major concern. We condemn the confiscation of Palestinian revenues and the destabilization of its institutions by Israel, and we call for them to cease immediately. All financial disputes must be settled through negotiation. We thank the donors who have increased their emergency aid and call on others to fulfil their unpaid pledges as soon as possible. Our roundtable on assistance to be held in Rome on 27 and 28 February, and to which Council delegations are invited, will focus on the new opportunities and the new challenges that result from resolution 67/19.

Our committee is encouraged by the diplomatic community's strong condemnation of the new settlement programmes decided upon by Israel, particularly in E-1. Those programmes must be stopped immediately. We would like to thank all members of the Council who have spoken out in framework of the "15 minus 1" configuration. Nevertheless, we note that the Security Council remains paralysed on that issue.

Our Committee will continue to remind States that they have the responsibility not to contribute to violations committed by Israel and to ensure that Israel respects the Fourth Geneva Convention, as reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice. We will continue to advocate for Palestinian unity and a resumption of the peace process on the internationally accepted bases.

The time has now come for all partners, especially the European Union, the League of Arab States, a revitalized Quartet and the Security Council to work hand in hand on bold initiatives to turn 2013 into a year of peace. They can count on our Committee's full support in this endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I welcome the presence here today of the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Riad Malki. Palestine recently attained non-member observer State status in the United Nations. This was far too late, coming some 65 years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II). It was the first step on the path towards the realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable right to establish an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967.

To that end, we call on the Security Council to respond to the call of the Palestinian State to be granted full Member State status in the United Nations, while guaranteeing the restoration of all the legitimate rights of all of the Palestinian people, including the return of Palestinian refugees to their motherland and the provision of compensation in a fair and equitable manner pursuant to resolution 194 (III) of 1948 for the losses incurred.

I can affirm that the Palestinian people, following the panoply of United Nations meetings that have been held since the Israeli occupation began, view us with skepticism. How could it be otherwise, given the fact that these people have been held hostage for more than 65 years under the most abject forms of racist and expansionist occupation? How could it be otherwise, given the continued systematic campaign of settlement activity, which has stamped out any hope for the emergence of a viable Palestinian State, halting not even for a single day? How, indeed, could it be otherwise, given that Israel, the occupying Power, has practiced and continues to perpetrate the worst forms of racial discrimination and flagrant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law? How could they not look with skepticism on the informal periodic meetings at which the Council has proven incapable of putting an end to the tragic suffering of these people and restoring their legitimate rights, ceding instead the large part of its prerogatives to the Quartet, which itself has failed to tackle the situation, seeking instead to sideline the General Assembly?

In the light of the unflinching support that several members of the Quartet have given to Israel, how could it be otherwise?

If we wish to preserve what is left of the credibility of the United Nations, uphold the prospects for peace in the region and prevent war, then the United Nations and

its Member States must refrain from the ceremonial and business-as-usual approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That approach lacks any serious content and cannot lead to tangible results on the ground. It is time to start taking concrete measures to bring to an end once and for all the inability of the United Nations to fulfil its obligations to stop the Israeli occupation of Arab territories — an inability that, as we all know, is the result of the intransigence of successive Israeli Governments, which have themselves been blindly supported and unfairly justified by a number of influential Powers present and active in the Council.

We were deeply alarmed by the fact that, in his briefing two days ago on priorities for 2013, the Secretary-General failed to include a reference to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was not included among the priorities. We are all the more alarmed as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process also failed in his briefing to refer to an essential component of his mandate and obligations — addressing the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan — even when it was brought to his attention and other representatives of the Secretariat warned him of the consequences of ignoring this essential component of the international stance on the Middle East.

This is an essential point; the occupied Syrian Golan is an integral part of the item before the Council. The representatives of the Secretary-General must therefore refer to the occupied Syrian Golan in their briefings and statements. In his briefing to the Security Council, the Special Coordinator avoided making any allusion whatsoever to the Golan, even though it is part of his mandate. Instead, he referred at length to the prevailing internal situation in Syria, even though that is not part of his mandate.

More than 45 years have passed since Israel occupied the Golan. However, apparently these long decades have not been enough to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolutions 497 (1981), 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), to bring its occupation of the Syrian Golan, its grave and systematic violations of human rights, its terrorist policy of racial discrimination and reprisals, and its unbridled expansionist activities to an end.

We call on Israel to provide international supervisors and organizations with maps of the areas that have been mined in the Syrian Golan. The explosion of cluster munitions and mines placed by the

occupying Power in the Syrian Golan have led to over 726 casualties, including 227 children. We have brought this information to the attention of the Secretary-General.

The most recent such acts of violence saw an increase in the number of abductions of Syrian citizens from the disengagement zone by the occupying Israeli Power. The Israeli authorities have even gone so far as to provide support to armed terrorist groups operating in the disengagement zone so as to exploit them to justify the construction of a wall of separation and racial discrimination that stretches 42 kilometres along the ceasefire line in the occupied Golan.

The intention of Israel and the occupying authorities is to pursue their unbridled attempts to tear the Golan from Syria and to include it as part of its occupation.

We underscore the need for the Golan to be returned in its entirety to my country. We call for the Golan to be restored to Syria, whether or not this is acceptable to the Israeli representative. In spite of the perpetration of all Israel's crimes; in spite of all the resolutions adopted by the United Nations; and in spite of all the reports that have been drawn up by the United Nations commissions of inquiry, condemning and describing these crimes unequivocally, it is truly regrettable that the Israeli leaders and perpetrators of these war crimes and crimes against humanity continue to shirk any responsibility or accountability at the international level because of the illegal immunity that has been granted to them by certain influential States.

We all witnessed this morning the insolence of the representative of Israel who, in his statement, unequivocally demonstrated that he is completely divorced from reality and operating in a state of political delirium and immoral hallucination, completely denigrating the rights of the Palestinian people. The Israeli representative is misled if he believes that he can alter or distort in any way the historic reality through a statement that is full of lies and political trickery. We call upon him to read this book *The General's Son*.

(spoke in English)

The General's Son is a kind of biography written by Miko Peled, son of the famous Israeli General Matti Peled. He is considered to be one of the most prominent Israeli generals who participated in Israel's wars against its neighbours in 1948, 1956 and 1967. The General, who passed away in 1995, converted to peace

and became a peace activist in Israel. The author speaks about the wrongdoings of Israel's policies towards the Palestinian people as well as towards the Arabs in the occupied territories. By the way, this man lives in Israel and is an Israeli citizen, but the book was published in Ramallah. The Palestinians authorized the publication of this book. The Israeli Government prevented it from being published.

(spoke in Arabic)

Once again, I am obliged to warn of the unbridled attempts of a number of delegations to water down the agreed traditional terms of reference concerning the situation in the Middle East by addressing other subjects at this debate and seeking to distance us from the matter at hand for the sake of pursuing their own objectives. The issue is putting an end to Israel's occupation of the occupied Arab territories and the establishment of a Palestinian State.

Accordingly, I shall not respond to the fraudulent allegations that have been made by a number of delegations against my country, Syria, during this debate, as this is a matter of principle. We must not find ourselves discussing an agenda item that we have often drawn warning attention to. Naturally, there is a great deal we could say to refute the allegations that have been put forward by some member States that have spared no effort in seeking to further exacerbate the crisis in Syria by supplying, sheltering and arming extremists and terrorists operating in Syria in order to stymie any possibility of finding a peaceful solution to the crisis. In this regard, I should like to point specifically to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

I shall be brief on this matter and will simply underline the fact that the Syrian Government recently submitted a comprehensive political programme for a resolution of the current crisis in Syria. This document is a national solution, based on dialogue between and among the Syrians themselves under Syrian leadership. We call upon all those who claim to be committed to resolving the situation in Syria to respond positively to this programme by putting forward constructive ideas to enable its implementation instead of rejecting political solutions or national dialogue. The crisis in Syria will find a peaceful solution on the Syrian scale.

Finally, our preference would have been for the first statement that was made to the Security Council by our colleague from the United States at the start of President Obama's second mandate, as well as the

statements made by our colleagues the representatives of France and the United Kingdom, to have been balanced in nature and to have been based on the reality on the ground in Syria, in keeping with their obligations pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions, international law, and Mr. Brahimi's mandate. Their statements ought to have been open to the priority of supporting the national dialogue mechanism to resolve the crisis in Syria in both a political and peaceful manner, on the basis of the aspirations of the Syrian people and led by Syrians themselves, as is recalled in the two resolutions addressing the Syrian crisis. Instead, they expressed support for one entity of the Syrian opposition, inciting it to operate against the motherland and the interests of the Syrian people, and thereby pushing them into a cycle of destruction and violence in my country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): I thank Pakistan for scheduling this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. Allow me to express our appreciation to the Foreign Minister of the observer State of Palestine for his speech this morning. I also thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry for his briefing.

The Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In addition, I wish briefly to make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

A sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, must be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should pledge complete commitment to this objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization.

It is a disgrace that the people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental rights to self-determination and to live freely in their own land. Palestinians have been denied their right to return home and live in dignity and safety. Achieving a lasting solution in the Middle East will require Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

We are happy that the General Assembly conferred on Palestine non-member observer State status in the

United Nations, but we are saddened that, in response, Israel announced on 30 November that it had accelerated planning for the construction of more than 3,000 new housing units in Jerusalem, potentially bisecting the West Bank. There is no doubt that these illegal and unilateral decisions of Israel are counterproductive to achieving a two-State solution. The announced settlement activity would be a breach of both the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The situation is further aggravated by another recent retaliatory announcement by Israel that it would withhold revenue from the Palestinian Authority. We believe that this unjust decision of the occupying Power will impair the Palestinian delivery of much-needed public services.

The situation of thousands of Palestinian prisoners — including women, elected officials and 300 children — in Israeli detention centres also remains a cause of worry. Those detained must either be charged and face trial with judicial guarantees, or be released without delay. Violations of the human rights of these detainees should be stopped. We know that justice delayed is justice denied.

We reaffirm past Security Council decisions that Israeli settlements in the occupied territory are illegal and constitute a major obstacle to peace. We believe that the best guides to achieving a two-State solution are the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions — including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) — the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. We reiterate our full support for the realization of an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and dignity.

With regard to the situation in Lebanon and in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, my delegation calls for full respect for resolutions 497 (1981) and 1701 (2006). We urge the occupying State immediately to halt its actions to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights in accordance with the relevant resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): At the outset please allow me to express our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly open debate

on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I should like to thank the Special Coordinator, Robert Serry, for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian question. I should also like to join others in welcoming the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the observer State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Malki, in today's debate and in thanking him for his statement. I should also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel for his statement.

Amid the unprecedented transformation of the Arab world, the continuing stalemate in the Middle East peace process is clearly not in the interests of the region. There have been no direct talks between Israel and Palestine for more than two years. The efforts of the international community, including those of the Quartet, towards the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine have yielded no results.

Against this backdrop, the overwhelming vote in the General Assembly on 29 November 2012, upgrading the status of Palestine to non-member observer State, was a positive development. It was a decisive achievement for Palestine in the history of its long and arduous struggle to reach its final goal of an independent and viable Palestinian State. India, which has always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral forums, co-sponsored that resolution. India will continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations.

Developments in the occupied Palestinian territories since the historic vote in the General Assembly have been most unhelpful to the Palestinian cause. The intensification of settlement activities by Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, despite widespread international condemnation, is creating new realities on the ground, thereby threatening the very premise of a two-State solution. We join others in urging Israel to end the settlement activity in order to allow the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

Settlements, roadblocks and the related infrastructure of occupation continue to cause severe hardship to the Palestinian population. These are also adversely affecting the normal functioning of Palestinian State institutions. The Palestinian Authority is facing a severe financial crisis. The financial crisis could erode the significant progress made in building Palestinian State institutions if immediate attention is

not given to the issue. There is an urgent need to support the Palestinian Authority in meeting its budgetary shortfalls.

The blockade of Gaza is in its sixth year. It is affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. While Israel has taken several measures to allow the flow of essential goods into Gaza, these cannot be a substitute for lifting the blockade. Recent hostilities in Gaza are again a stark reminder to the international community of the dangers that a continuing stalemate in the peace process can bring about. We hope that both parties will continue to uphold the ceasefire agreement and implement its provisions in good faith.

The recent rapprochement between various Palestinian factions is indeed welcome. We hope that efforts towards the promotion of reconciliation will bear fruit soon, leading to the formation of a unity Government, the holding of elections, the reunification of Palestinian State institutions, and measures for the reconstruction and development of Palestinian society.

India has a long history of solidarity with the Palestinian people. In 1975, India was the first non-Arab State to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and in 1988 became one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine. India has also extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority since its establishment, and has been a partner in the socioeconomic development of Palestine in its quest for a life of dignity and self-reliance. Our assistance has been for humanitarian relief, development projects, the establishment of educational and training facilities, budgetary support, and so on.

This year, India has pledged \$10 million in budgetary support to Palestine. India also contributes \$1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Following the three memorandum of understanding's signed during the visit of President Abbas to India in September 2012, India is in the process of implementing projects in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and the construction of schools. In addition, India is implementing development projects in Palestine, with Brazil and South Africa as partners in the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum.

India supports a negotiated settlement resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of

Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in various Security Council resolutions and the Quartet road map. Let me also state here that progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks remains critical for lasting peace in the region. We remain hopeful that an environment conducive to direct talks can be achieved in the near future. India stands ready to play its part in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Lastly, we remain seriously concerned at the deteriorating security situation and continuing violence in Syria. We strongly condemn all violence and violations of human rights, irrespective of who their perpetrators are. We also condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be committed in Syria. We urge all the parties to stop violence and engage in an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the conflict through peaceful means, based on the internationally approved political and legal basis including the resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) and the joint communiqué of the Geneva Action Group (S/2012/523, annex).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Laher (South Africa): South Africa expresses its appreciation to Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing to the Council and for the statements by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We have served as a member of the Security Council for the past two years as an elected member, during which time we had the opportunity to take part in discussions on today's subject at least 24 times. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked at this juncture is this: "What has really happened in the past 24 months, or the last few years for that matter?" Our objective response to that question is that over the past few years we have seen the following: the continued occupation of Palestinian land; continued insecurity for the people of Palestine and Israel; the continued blockade of Gaza; continued conflict in Gaza; continued rocket fire into southern Israel; the continued construction of the separation wall; continued threat to regional

and international peace and security; and continued inaction by the Security Council.

That is not an impressive record for the United Nations in general, and for the Security Council in particular, on whose watch the situation has deteriorated for decades on end without any hope of a lasting solution. In November of last year, the majority of States Members of the United Nations, including the majority of the members of the Security Council, welcomed Palestine to the United Nations as an observer State.

Last year, the Security Council had the opportunity to affirm Palestine's statehood, but unfortunately it failed to do so. In anticipation of reaction to Palestine's admission to the United Nations, we had warned against any acts of retribution; but, no sooner had we welcomed Palestine into the United Nations fold, that Israel announced that it would withhold Palestinian tax revenues. That retributive reaction is illegal and immoral, as it constitutes collective punishment of the Palestinian population and negatively affects the effectiveness of the Palestinian Authority, which is already facing serious challenges with regard to institution-building and the provision of myriad of public goods. We condemn that act and call on Israel to respect the decision on Palestine as it, in fact, is a positive step towards the realization of the two-State solution.

South Africa condemns the ongoing settlement activities by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. The continued construction of settlements seriously undermines the two-State solution by isolating East Jerusalem and by threatening the viability and territorial contiguity of a Palestinian State. Those illegal settlements further constitute a major stumbling block in the resumption of direct negotiations, and therefore in the achievement of sustainable peace. It is now high time that the Council speaks with one voice against these counter-productive actions. We condemn all acts of violence regardless of where they come from, as they undermine the viability of a two-State solution.

Despite calls on Israel to lift the blockade of Gaza, it continues to execute its policies in the enclave with impunity, without any action from the Council. Israel must stop those policies, as they are contrary to international law and render peace elusive. As we all know, at the heart of the confrontation between the Palestinians in Gaza and the Israelis, lie the latter's

continued illegal occupation of Palestinian land, especially the continuing blockade of Gaza.

The ongoing efforts of Egypt in reconciling the Palestinian parties are indeed commendable. We encourage the Palestinian parties to forge ahead with their reconciliation efforts in order to consolidate the gains made, and act in unity for the permanent liberation of the people of Palestine. We cannot overemphasize enough the importance of the unity of the Palestinian people as they seek to build a new and prosperous nation, whose complete affirmation hinges on the implementation of the two-State solution.

With no peace on the horizon and the Quartet not making any significant progress, we maintain the view that the Quartet's utility should be urgently evaluated. As a member of the Quartet, the Members of the United Nations have an obligation to ask questions about the body's usefulness and the role of the United Nations in this body.

With regard to the situation in Syria, we are deeply concerned about the further deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation, including violence against the Palestinian refugees in the country. South Africa continues to maintain that the only solution to the Syrian crisis is an all-inclusive process of national dialogue, free from any form of intimidation, violence or outside interference aimed at regime change. Syria requires a political transition that reflects the will of its people. In that regard, we once again discourage the arming of all parties, including the opposition.

In conclusion, we believe that in our search for a solution to the Palestinian question we should not lose sight of the broader regional dynamics. We therefore call on the Council and the rest of the international community to accelerate constructive efforts towards the holistic resolution of the Middle East crisis, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (spoke in Arabic): First, I should like to thank the Pakistani presidency of the Security Council for convening this important meeting. It provides us all with an opportunity to update ourselves on the situation in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the Palestinian question. We would also like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Robert Serry, for the valuable report he has submitted. We also

thank Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, for his important statement to the Security Council.

The 29 November debate in the General Assembly and the vote on resolution 67/19, giving Palestine non-member observer State status, was an important step in achieving its legitimate ambitions (see A/67/PV.44). The resolution reflects the unanimous desire and support of the international community to see a Palestinian State that is independent within the framework of the two-State principle. That historic event shows that there is no alternative to peace and stability and to open new horizons for the people of that region. However, Israel, the occupying Power, still does not understand that this is an opportunity for peace, which is founded on this international decision. Israel has categorically rejected that resolution and the new State that it represents in the region.

That resolution opens the way to genuine peace negotiations. However, Israel has not only refused but has defied the international community by imposing collective punishment on a large scale, withholding tax and customs revenues and continuing its occupation. Because of its negative reaction in response to the Palestinian step, which has been supported by the majority of the international community, Israel is showing the world that it does not want peace. The Israeli response in the face of this international consensus was to continue to build settlements and to step up the building of new ones.

The Israeli decision has negative implications for peace and does not provide the necessary conditions for negotiations. Israel is continuing to neglect its international commitments and is trying to change the facts on the ground. The decision of the Israeli Government to build new settlements is a flagrant violation of the provisions of international law governing the situation for occupied territories, all the more so given that this step changes the character of the occupied territory and threatens to fragment the territory and foreclose the chances for establishing a Palestinian State. Israel is trying to isolate East Jerusalem from the surrounding Palestinian territories of the West Bank so as to make it a Jewish city and prevent a just and comprehensive peace from being achieved. That is a flagrant violation of the two-State solution that is based on international consensus.

It is our hope that in this new year and in the coming months it will be possible to break the deadlock, instead of merely managing the crisis as has been the case in previous years, and to focus attention on resolving it. There should be a new dynamism so as to deal with the real issues underlying the conflict.

It is our hope, in this context, that the leading role of the Security Council, and of the United Nations as a whole, will come into play; it has the responsibility under the Charter to maintain international peace and security. It is our hope that the positive change in the position of a number of States, including members of the Security Council, will continue and that this change will promote the voice of international legality, which we hope to see come into play so as to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their historical, legitimate right to establish their own independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Sin Son Ho (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Mr. President, allow me first of all to express my thanks to you for having convened this meeting. I wish also to express my appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing to the Council today.

My delegation would like to associate itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As witnessed by the world last year, on 29 November, General Assembly resolution 67/19, on the non-member observer state status of Palestine, was adopted by the General Assembly with the support of an overwhelming majority. The granting of non-member observer status to Palestine in the United Nations was a historic event that reflected the desire of the international community to put an end to the decades-long Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and to realize the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

My delegation joined in sponsoring and supporting the resolution, along with the majority of the States Members of the United Nations. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Palestine once again on its status in the United Nations.

It is, however, deeply regrettable that the Palestinian situation is deteriorating instead of moving in a positive direction, despite the absolute support and the efforts of the international community.

Israel has turned a deaf ear to the just and fair demands of the international community and continued to cling to the aggressive and inhuman policies of illegally occupying Arab territories, expanding settlements, blocking the Gaza Strip, ruthlessly killing civilians and so on.

Israel recently decided to build thousands of new settlement units while confiscating land and seizing money, seriously threatening the basic right to existence of the Palestinian people, as a political reprisal against Palestinian observer State status in the United Nations.

Those are rampant provocative acts and challenges against the majority of States Members of the United Nations, international law and related United Nations resolutions that supported the founding of an independent Palestinian State and durable peace and stability in the Middle East.

Israel's undisguised confiscation of Palestinian land under the pretext of settlement expansion shows clearly that it is none other than Israel that is aggravating the situation and seriously threatening peace and security in the Middle East.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly denounces Israel for its settlement expansion and demands that Israel immediately stop any act undermining peace and security in the region and withdraw its forces from all illegally occupied Arab and Palestinian territories. Israel's continuous provocations are unthinkable without the support and protection of the United States. That clearly shows the hypocritical nature of the United States policy towards peace in the Middle East.

The establishment of an independent State of Palestine is an inalienable sovereign right of the Palestinian people.

It is today a world trend to support the justified struggle of the Palestinian people for an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within 1967 borders.

The number of countries in the United Nations recognizing the State of Palestine has reached more than 130, which represents a majority of the States

Members of the United Nations. The non-member observer State status of Palestine is a great development that encourages us all.

That reality will surely bring about the realization of Palestine's full United Nations membership and the establishment of an independent sovereign State of Palestine.

The Security Council, whose mandate is the maintenance of international peace and security, should pay due attention to the changed realities of today and take strong measures to achieve a fair solution of the Palestinian question and not turn away from Israel's inhuman crimes, such as the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the expansion of settlement units.

If the Security Council, despite the demands of the international community, continues to protect only the interests of a certain specific country in support of Israel, that will have a negative effect on peace and security in the Middle East and damage more than ever before the credibility and reliability of the international community in the Security Council.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to reiterate its full support and consistent stand for the just cause of the Palestinian people regaining their legitimate national rights, including the establishment of an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the pleasure to speak today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the outset, I would like to convey the Movement's appreciation to the Pakistani presidency of the Security Council for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

I would like to express the Movement's appreciation for the high-level participation in this important meeting, as well as the report presented by Mr. Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The Movement believes that Israel's settlement activities constitute grave breaches of international law and violate numerous United Nations resolutions, including resolutions of the Security Council. Such activities undermine the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory,

including East Jerusalem. This issue also remains the foremost obstacle to peace, impairing all efforts to revive credible peace negotiations aimed at bringing an end to the Israeli occupation and achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern over the continuing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Movement condemns the provocative announcement by Israel, the occupying Power, that it will construct 3,000 settlement units on confiscated Palestinian land in an area east of occupied East Jerusalem, now widely known as the E-1 plan, in addition to declarations regarding the construction of another 3,600 settlement units.

Those deplorable actions in rapid succession are a grave breach of all the principles and rules of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which governs situations in lands under foreign occupation, and are in blatant contempt of the demands and will of the international community and the hand that has been extended in peace by the Palestinian leadership. Israel's illegal settlement activities and the illegal actions by extremist Israeli settlers are also causing extensive physical, economic and social devastation throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. This is deplorable and must come to a complete halt.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns and rejects those illegal actions by Israel, the occupying Power, which have been deliberately intensified since the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 67/19, which, *inter alia*, accorded to Palestine the status of non-member observer State in the United Nations. The Movement demands that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately rescind those plans and measures and cease completely all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem, and abide by all of its legal obligations.

NAM continues to call on the Council to uphold its Charter responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, including with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NAM also calls on the parties to return to the path of peace on the basis of the long-standing terms of reference of the peace process, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, for the achievement of a just and lasting final settlement.

The Non-Aligned Movement also condemns Israel's decision to withhold the Palestinian tax revenues due to the Palestinian Authority, in violation of agreements reached between the two sides and of international law. On that issue, Israel has also declared that its decision is a reprisal for the adoption of resolution 67/19. Such a deplorable act constitutes a blatant act of piracy and collective punishment. It is impairing the Palestinian delivery of public services, payment of public sector salaries and operation of governmental institutions and is further exacerbating the financial crisis.

The Movement expresses its grave concern over the construction of the apartheid annexation wall in violation of international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, of 9 July 2004. It calls upon the international community, including the Security Council, to compel Israel to cease those illegal actions and measures.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses grave concern over the deteriorating situation and deplorable conditions of thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees who continue to be held unlawfully in Israeli jails and detention centres, including at least 300 children as well as women and elected officials, and calls for their immediate release.

The Movement also remains concerned about the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We call once again for the full and immediate lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade, which has now entered its sixth year and is in violation of resolution 1860 (2009), other relevant United Nations resolutions and international humanitarian law, which prohibits collective punishment of civilian populations under occupation. Israel must promptly and unconditionally open all its crossing points with Gaza and end its continued obstruction of the freedom of movement of persons and of the reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its conviction of the urgent need for the international community to act resolutely and collectively to fulfil its long-standing commitment to, and responsibility for, the realization of a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, on the basis of international law and the terms of reference of the peace process, including the resolutions of the Council.

The Movement remains resolute in its commitment to continue to assist the Palestinian people in their

legitimate quest for dignity, justice and their inalienable right to self-determination in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The achievement of those noble goals is long overdue, and its continued postponement will only put the goal of the two-State solution and the conclusion of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace further out of reach.

The Movement regrets that all efforts to date by international and regional parties, including the Quartet, have failed to achieve any progress owing to the deliberate obstruction by Israel, the occupying Power, its refusal to respect the parameters of the peace process and its insistence on continuing to change the facts on the ground, in total contradiction of the goal of the two-State solution, the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The Movement also takes this opportunity to express its support for Palestinian reconciliation efforts, which Egypt continues to sponsor, and hopes that Palestinian unity will soon be restored in the interest of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Turning to Lebanon, the Movement condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and calls on all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragile situation and avoid a resurgence of hostilities. Such actions also constitute a threat to international peace and security and are a continuation of Israel's aggression against Lebanon.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical or demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and Israeli measures to impose its own jurisdiction and administration there are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The States members of the Non-Aligned Movement reiterate their continuous calls on the Security Council to act urgently to send a clear message to Israel, the occupying Power, that all of those illegal actions will not be tolerated and must be fully halted forthwith. The message must be sent to Israel that it is expected to abide by the rule of law, cease all illegal measures intended

to alter and prejudge the situation on the ground and cease all provocations and incitement. Israel's blatant impunity and disregard for the law cannot be tolerated.

Allow me to speak very briefly in my national capacity to respond to the unfounded references made to my country by the representative of the Israeli regime.

There has been a consensus over the past 65 years that the Palestinian question is the core issue in the Middle East and affects directly or indirectly any other problem in the region. There is also a growing consensus that Israel's continued aggression and unabated atrocities against the Palestinian people lie at the core of the Palestinian issue. Therefore, the Council is today debating the repeated and grave crimes perpetrated by Israeli regime against the Palestinian people, including its establishment of new settlements in Palestine and blocking of the revenue of the Palestinians.

However, the representative of that regime, echoing the words of the representative of its ally State, attempted once again to divert the debate towards Iran and, among other things, referred to Iran's peaceful nuclear programme. The irony is that a regime is talking about Iran's peaceful nuclear activities while it possesses the only stockpile of nuclear arms in our region. The nuclear weapon in the hands of that regime, with its record of State terrorism and aggression, has always been a major concern for the Middle East. It is as absurd as it is appalling that the Israelis now try to hide their atrocious and egregious acts behind empty rhetoric aimed against my country. It is obvious that their propaganda against Iran has always been a smokescreen they send up to mask their actions and to divert public opinion from their land usurpation policies and other crimes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): At the outset, Mr. President, my delegation would like to thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, for his comprehensive and detailed briefing. The Indonesian delegation is particularly pleased to welcome the participation of Mr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine, in this meeting.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Like many members of the international community, Indonesia is very concerned over the absence of progress in the peace process between Israel and Palestine. We are very clear about one thing: the hurdle of illegal settlements is the most potent obstacle to the prospect of peace in the Middle East, with particular implications for the two-State solution. In recent months, Israel has continued its defiance by proclaiming an escalation in settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and East Jerusalem, including through the so-called E-1 corridor plan. That attitude is an affront to the cause of peace. It must be confronted, and it must be stopped.

Because of those considerations, my delegation reiterates that Israel must fully abide by the resolutions of this Council in respect of settlements. Continued illegal construction and expansion of settlements compounds the problem of fragmentation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. That inevitably hinders the prospect of negotiations.

All the while, Gaza continues to endure widespread suffering caused by Israel's menacing blockade, making recovery almost impossible in that area. Meanwhile, we must also urgently and comprehensively address dire humanitarian needs of the Palestinian Authority, which are directly linked to the damaging and illegal Israeli policy of withholding tax revenues. In that regard, I wish to underline the calls made by the Palestinian leadership for the contributions that the Authority urgently needs in order to carry out its functions, deploy humanitarian relief and develop its capacity.

Indonesia remains ardently supportive of the two-State solution, based on the conviction that an independent State of Palestine, with rights and responsibilities equal to those of other States, will contribute to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The historic decision by the General Assembly to accord non-member observer State status to Palestine, through resolution 67/19, is indeed a strong testament to the support of the majority of Member States for the struggle of Palestine to exercise its right to self-determination, in line with the principles outlined in relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road

map and the Arab Peace Initiative. However, we must continue our support for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations.

Let me now turn to the situation in Syria, which has been raging for some time now. We must urgently work for an immediate end to the violence and address the dire humanitarian needs of the people. We must also ensure that vital humanitarian assistance can reach the people in need of it, in order to stop the deplorable human suffering of the Syrian people. To complement the work of the Joint Special Representative for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, the international community must play a more robust role and be united so as to find a comprehensive solution to the situation. Indonesia welcomes the upcoming International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, to be held later this month in Kuwait.

Finally, we must also start, without delay, a political process aimed at finding solutions that are in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the Syrian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): The conflict in Syria must be stopped. The Council's inability so far to unite in action weakens the prospects for peace. The conflict has already had dire consequences for Syria and the Syrian people. We are all aware of the tremendous cost, with over 60,000 people killed and the already high numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons increasing every day. The Icelandic Government, for its part, decided last week to contribute close to \$200,000 to United Nations humanitarian assistance.

The Security Council must take the lead in fostering a political and peaceful solution, for the sake of Syria and the Syrian people as well as for wider regional stability, which could easily be threatened should the conflict continue. Waiting is not an option. The Security Council has the responsibility and the tools to maintain international peace and security, and the situation calls for urgent Council action.

Steps must be taken to ensure that the regime and anyone else responsible for the horrible atrocities committed will ultimately be held accountable. For that reason, Iceland was among 57 Member States that jointly sent the Security Council a letter last week requesting the Council to refer the situation in Syria

to the International Criminal Court (S/2013/19, annex). We would like to take the opportunity here today to reiterate that request.

The Palestinian people enjoy overwhelming support among the United Nations membership for their inalienable right to self-determination. That was clearly expressed by the membership on 29 November last year, when the General Assembly, in resolution 67/19, welcomed the State of Palestine as a non-member observer State.

That development will hopefully persuade the Security Council to take a more active role in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For too long, especially in the absence of an active peace process, the involvement of the international community has mainly been reactionary, with statements being issued on an ad hoc basis in reaction to individual actions, such as the recent decision of the Israeli Government to go ahead with building new settlements in the E-1 zone. If the international community is indeed committed to the two-State solution, it has to become proactive instead of being a passive bystander.

"We exist." That is a phrase from an appeal sent by Palestinians living in and around the E-1 area asking relevant parties to advocate on their behalf that they not be evicted from their homes and displaced again. "We exist." Those are the words of people who have again and again been victims of demolitions of their properties, rendering them and their families repeatedly homeless. "We exist" is a necessary reminder to us all that, in the end, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is about a people that indeed exist and their land.

Iceland would like to use this opportunity to urge the Security Council to visit the State of Palestine, to reaffirm the illegality of the settlements, to accept the State of Palestine's application for United Nations membership and, finally, to bring the parties back to the negotiation table.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Müftüoğlu (Turkey): A this is the first Security Council open debate on the Middle East since the historic General Assembly meeting of 29 November 2012 (see A/67/PV.44), allow me to start by expressing once again our sincere congratulations to the Palestinian leadership, represented today by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the observer State

of Palestine, on the long-awaited and well-deserved international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

Turkey considers the overwhelming support of the international community to be an initial step towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. Yet it is unrealistic to expect that the peace can prevail when the fundamental pillars of the two-State vision are undermined time and again by the settlement policies of Israel. Since the previous open debate (see S/PV.6847), we have learned of the intention of the Israeli Government to build on the so-called E-1 area. Invitations to tender for the construction of new buildings in Kiryat Arba and Efrat, approval to construct 1,500 new units in Ramat Shlomo and the initiation of the planning process to build in Givat Hamatos and Gilo are policies and actions that show the clear intention to render impossible a realistic and viable two-State solution. We also call for the resumption of the transfer of tax and clearance revenues that Israel owes Palestine, in line with the Paris Protocol.

Not only Turkey, but also the vast majority of the international community is seriously worried about such acts. The Secretary-General has also repeatedly voiced his concerns regarding the ongoing illegal settlement activity. As such, statements by the Israeli leadership indicating that no settlements in the West Bank will be removed are regrettable, as is the announcement that no harm to the contiguity between Jerusalem and Maale Adumim will be allowed.

The peace process is going through a crucial period. Amid reports that the prospect of a two-State solution is diminishing every day, the international community should provide its full support and motivate the parties towards results-oriented negotiations. We welcome the recent meetings between President Abbas and Khaled Mashaal as a very important step towards long-overdue Palestinian reconciliation. There is no doubt that a united Palestinian voice will bring further support to the Palestinian cause.

As the elections in Israel are just completed, we sincerely hope that the results will facilitate a way to peace. Turkey will continue to support the peace process and the rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people to internationally recognized statehood, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turkey therefore welcomed the Palestinian appeal for membership in the United Nations, submitted by

President Mahmoud Abbas on 23 September 2011 (S/2011/592, annex I), and continues to support the right of Palestine to be represented under this roof among its international peers.

The ceasefire achieved with the able mediation of Egypt following Israel's latest military operation into Gaza required steps to be taken regarding the lifting of the illegal blockade on Gaza. Yet another two months have passed, adding up to more than five years of collective punishment of the Palestinians living in Gaza. We call on the international community to continue to pursue its efforts to help end that illegal blockade once and for all.

Last week, the Council heard from Ms. Navi Pillay and Ms. Valerie Amos about the humanitarian dimension of the Syrian crisis and the latest developments on the ground. Today, we have listened to the briefing of Special Coordinator Mr. Serry. With more than 60,000 dead, 2 million displaced and 4 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, the crisis in Syria is the most rapidly growing humanitarian crisis in the world. The Syrian people are desperately waiting for action from the international community, especially from this very Council. The total number of asylum seekers hosted in 15 active camps in Turkey has reached 158,000. Five more camps are under construction to meet the increasing demand.

We have said many times before, and I repeat once again, that we will continue, with the help of the relevant United Nations bodies and other international actors, to extend our helping hand to the Syrian people during this dire period. That said, we categorically refute the allegations that were unfairly directed at my country earlier today by one of the previous speakers.

It is a fact that crises in the Middle East are not easy to confine. Their ramifications have the potential to threaten regional peace and stability, and even beyond. Things become even more complex when different crises become intertwined. That is exactly what we see in the case of Palestinian refugees in Syria.

Through its overwhelming majority vote, the international community sent a message on 29 November 2012 (see General Assembly resolution 67/19). We hope that the message is read correctly and followed ambitiously. While welcoming the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator, Mr. Serry, we call on the international community to give its decisive support to the resumption of comprehensive

peace negotiations between the parties for a just and lasting solution based on international recognition of Palestine, with the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with Israel.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In my national capacity, I wish to underscore some important aspects of the matter before us.

Time and again, such debates on the Middle East region are held by Security Council without achieving any progress on the issue. The main political problem in the Middle East is Israel's systematic aggression against Palestine. The Security Council must play its role in maintaining international peace and security and immediately adopt concrete practical measures so that Israel stops its abuses and illegal policies and practices against the Palestinian people.

Israel's behaviour deliberately contravenes United Nations resolutions and international laws, is a threat to regional and international peace and security, and violates the human rights of an entire people through flagrant, systematic and inhuman abuses that this body should condemn.

The Israeli illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the primary obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the Middle East region. There will not be peace in the Middle East as long as such aggressions continue and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are not taken into account.

The General Assembly adopted a historic decision on 29 November 2012, when its members, by a majority decision, accorded Palestine non-member observer States status in the United Nations. Cuba co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 67/19, consistent with its long-standing position of support for the cause of the Palestinian people to defend their rights. However, that action must be an interim step towards Palestine's eventual admission as a full State Member of the United Nations, which Cuba fully supports. The Security Council must consider and approve without further delay Palestine's 2011 request for recognition as a United Nations Member State.

The reprisals of the Israeli Government related to the adoption of resolution 67/19 on 29 November 2012 are unacceptable. Its brutality against the Palestinian people has resulted in the deaths of more innocent civilians and in huge material damage that has aggravated the already precarious living conditions of the Palestinian people in that small, besieged territory. Likewise, Israel's decision to withhold tax revenues due to the Palestinian National Authority, in violation of agreements between the two parties and of international law, and the new settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian territories are highly reprehensible actions.

Cuba will continue supporting the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Cuba calls on Israel to end its occupation of all Arab territories, and reiterates again its position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East region.

Cuba is closely following the situation in Syria. The Security Council was not conceived as an instrument to promote regime change. The intentions of some to foment Security Council actions and pronouncements aimed at increasing violence, undermining a sovereign Government, generating insecurity and leading a nation into a social and humanitarian crisis of unforeseeable consequences are cause for concern. The obligation of this organ is to promote peace, not violence; to prevent destabilization, not to finance, arm and train those intent on destabilization; and to protect innocent people, not to use or manipulate them for geopolitical purposes. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole.

A civil war in Syria or an intervention by foreign forces will have serious consequences for international peace and security, particularly the Middle East region. Cuba shares the concern over the loss of innocent lives in Syria and anywhere else in the world. It also condemns violent acts taking place in that country against the innocent civilian population, carried out by all those involved in that or any other conflict. We reject any attempt to make alleged efforts to protect human lives a pretext for foreign intervention, whether directly or with the support of irregular armed groups, including mercenaries who only sow destruction and death.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Syrian people to exercise full self-determination and sovereignty, without foreign interference or intervention of any kind. The role of the international community at this difficult moment of a United Nations Member State is to help safeguard peace and stability in the country. We reiterate our confidence in the capacity of the Syrian people and Government to solve their internal problems without foreign interference. We demand full respect for the self-determination and sovereignty of that Arab country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Sir, for convening this important debate. Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Middle East increases anxiety for world peace with each passing day. The world needs proactive leadership to address the critical uncertainty in the region. We believe that it is the responsibility of the parties to create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. The continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are a crucial factor in the escalation of suspicion and the lack of trust between the parties to the conflict in the Middle East.

The settlement activity of the occupying Power is a clear violation of the law and of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as the International Court of Justice, have all condemned the settlement activity as illegal. The resumption of talks has also been tied to that issue. We are further dismayed by the escalation of illegal settlement activity since the General Assembly's decision to accord Palestine status as non-member observer State of the United Nations. It is an unnecessary provocation in an already difficult situation.

Despite the brief moment of celebration in the General Assembly following the adoption of resolution 67/19 according new status to Palestine, the Palestinians have yet to realize their right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty and remain dispossessed from much of their land. Israel's practice of demolishing Palestinian homes further fuels resentment. The continuation of that practice cannot

contribute to confidence-building or the peace process. We encourage the parties to exercise restraint for the sake of the greater goal of peace.

The world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially Gaza, where conditions remain unsustainable. Grievances based on violations of economic, social and individual rights have the capacity to ignite violence and even spill over borders. In Gaza, the blockade, which is now entering its sixth year, has created an aid-dependent economy and reinforced a sense of helplessness and extremism. Even a modest improvement in the situation in Gaza will require the lifting of the blockade and the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009).

The United Nations is required to keep the vast majority of the people in Gaza supplied with their minimum necessities. We underline our strong support for the work of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Sri Lanka will continue to encourage political rapprochement between Gaza and the West Bank. The political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people will contribute to the viability of the two-State solution. We are pleased that the Palestinian Authority, despite severe political and economic constraints, has made progress in institution-building. We are particularly dismayed at the severe financial hardships being imposed on the Palestine Authority.

While Israel must desist from actions that contravene the established rules of international law and practice, and as we support the two-State solution, we are also conscious of the security needs of Israel. Palestinians and Israelis could enjoy security and peace as neighbours through a mutually agreed political solution, with human rights at its heart.

The peace process, which was once so enthusiastically embraced, is at an impasse and tensions continue to escalate. A climate conducive to peace will be encouraged by a mutual approach sensitive to each other's concerns. Both parties to the conflict must actively pursue every possibility for peace with a view to ultimately establishing an independent State of Palestine, existing peacefully side by side with Israel. Sri Lanka remains committed to the attainment of the

inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and to a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to reiterate the support of our Permanent Mission to the United Nations to your great country, Pakistan, in its duties as President of the Security Council.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The rights of the Palestinian people to their lands are ancestral, and are increasingly besieged and isolated by Israel, the occupying Power. That natural corridor between Asia and Africa, with access to the Mediterranean Sea, and seat of ancient cultures, has been and is a region coveted by colonialists and ancient and modern empires.

Archeological findings reveal that the oldest villages of humankind date back to as many as 9,000 years before our era. Palestine is a trove of thousands of years of history. The epic of Atrahasis, the great sage, tells of a time expressed in Babylonian terms "when gods were in the ways of men" — a time when humans did not inhabit the Earth. The Earth was inhabited only by gods, who were divided into two classes: the Igigi, who worked the land and with their labour fed and eased the lives of the aristocracy of the gods, and the Annunaki, who lived off the work of others. Exhausted by their oppressive labours, the Igigi rebelled against the other gods and claimed luminous life in the sunlight.

So it is that since time immemorial, gods and humans have risen up against oppression and injustice. The myth comes to mind now that the Palestinian people are claiming their inalienable right to exercise authority over their own land and to occupy a worthy place in history, without subjugation and oppression. This umbilical cord connecting a people with its ancestral roots helps to explain the heroic resistance of the Palestinians and of the Arabs of the Middle East in defence of their national and cultural identity.

Permanent members of the Security Council have prevented the Council from promoting arrangements to facilitate a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question, in fulfilment of its primary responsibilities

in the maintenance of international peace and security under the Charter of the United Nations. The intensification of the conflict is associated with the impunity enjoyed by Israel, the occupying Power. Its political and military elite, exploiting the support, influence and power of veto of a permanent member of the Security Council, flagrantly violates international law, the human rights of the Palestinian people and international humanitarian law.

The violations of international law by that elite in the occupied territories of the State of Palestine are evident. Their actions include, among others, the trampling of the territorial sovereignty of the Palestinian people, the destruction of the economy, the displacement of populations, the destruction of basic infrastructure and crops, and targeted and mass killings within the framework of its policy of State terrorism. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict also unmasks the imperial political and economic interests associated with the interests of political and economic groups of countries of the region. The desire to control the oil reserves of the Middle East is key to understanding the prevailing situation.

Venezuela reiterates its rejection of the interference of foreign Powers and their support for the terrorist groups in Syria that are responsible for widespread violence aimed at promoting the overthrow of the legitimate Government of President Bashar Al-Assad. We call for the cessation of armed violence in order to find a negotiated political solution to the crisis that is confronting the Syrian Government and opposition forces, taking into account the political initiative proposed by President Bashar Al-Assad a few days ago. We reiterate our full support for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, in accord with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Some members of the Security Council have called attention to the opportunist manipulation of resolution 1973 (2011), concerning Libya, thereby contributing, fortunately, to containing the warmongering plans of certain countries. The nature of the United Nations and the validity of its Charter are at stake. Foreign intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign States and armed aggression have been the methods of choice used by some Powers to attain their colonialist objectives. On behalf of the alleged defence of democracy and human rights, inspired by the policy of regime change, peoples are massacred and their legitimate institutions destroyed.

We emphasize that there is no good terrorism. All terrorism is harmful, as it promotes the dismantling of States and their sovereignty. Never have terrorism, interventionism and the violation of human rights been acceptable options. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Government reiterates that political dialogue and the use of peaceful means of settlement of disputes are the most expeditious tools for resolving disputes or conflicts. Sovereign peoples and States solely responsible for designing and implementing their own destiny.

In the current historical circumstances, as the drums of war grow loud, the Sixteenth Summit of the Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Tehran in August 2012 appealed for the resumption and advancement of the Middle East peace process based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1850 (2008); the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace; and the Arab Peace Initiative. The dignitaries stated that

"the construction and expansion of settlements and the Wall...are totally contradictory to the peace process and must be ceased completely for the resumption of credible peace negotiations".

They also

"reiterated the necessity and urgency of ending the prolonged, unlawful Israeli occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. They further reaffirmed their long-standing position in support of the achievement of the independence of the State of Palestine in all of the Palestinian Territory occupied by Israel in 1967, including East Jerusalem as its capital".

In conclusion, the Government of President Hugo Chávez Frías of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reiterates its support of the legitimate aspiration of the State of Palestine to become a full Member of the United Nations. We hope that the objections filed by a permanent member of this body will be withdrawn so that the General Assembly is able to approve expeditiously the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member, in the light of a possible recommendation of the Security Council, consistent with the provisions of the Charter. The Security Council must fully exercise the powers which that legal instrument, the constituting document of the United Nations, accords it in this area.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rishchynski (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the Pakistani presidency of the Security Council for this opportunity to share with the Council Canada's views concerning the situation in the Middle East. Canada would like to begin with a few remarks on the situation in Syria.

(*spoke in English*)

In Syria, President Bashar Al-Assad's desperate attempt to cling to power and deny Syrians their legitimate democratic rights is as tragic as it is futile. With more than 60,000 deaths and over 650,000 refugees having been forced to flee the country, the agony of the Syrian people cries out for action. Al-Assad's callous disregard for the suffering of ordinary Syrians has made it appallingly clear that he will not relinquish power voluntarily, while the atrocities he has committed ensure that the conflict will persist so long as he remains. Therefore, we believe it incumbent on the international community to take action. We call on the Security Council to live up to its responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security by imposing binding sanctions against the Al-Assad regime before any more innocent lives are lost needlessly.

Canada stands with the Syrian people in their struggle against tyranny. We have imposed 11 rounds of sanctions on the Al-Assad regime and its supporters. We have provided \$23.5 million in humanitarian assistance and have also provided support to Syria's neighbours, which have generously taken on the huge burdens associated with hosting so many refugees. We are also working to support the peaceful democratic opposition, encouraging them to reach out to all Syrian people, including, in particular, the country's diverse ethnic and religious communities. The Syrian opposition coalition must convince Syrians that it is a viable alternative to the Al-Assad regime — one that will respect minority rights, preserve Syria's long tradition of pluralism, and establish a new, peaceful, democratic Government that respects the rights of all of its citizens.

Let me now turn to Iran. Canada continues to believe that the regime in Iran poses the greatest threat to international peace and security in the world today. Regrettably, the regime continues to thwart intensive efforts to find a negotiated resolution to the crisis provoked by its nuclear ambitions. Last week, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

again renewed negotiations with Iran and, regrettably, returned to Vienna empty-handed. Evidence is mounting that Iran's nuclear programme is not exclusively for peaceful purposes, and the Iranian regime seems to have little genuine interest in allaying the concerns of the international community. Canada is deeply concerned that Iran is manipulating support for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as a cover for a weapons programme that threatens regional and global security. We appeal to the United Nations and all Member States to use their influence with the Iranian regime to press for an urgent and meaningful change in approach, beginning with constructive engagement with both the IAEA and the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany.

The Iranian regime also, in our view, poses a threat to the fundamental human values that all nations aim to protect and foster. One month ago, the General Assembly adopted, for the ninth year in a row, a comprehensive resolution on the human rights situation in Iran (resolution 67/182). Regrettably, the systematic repression of human rights has continued. Executions, including public executions in stadiums and public parks, and systematic abuses by Iranian security services, the increasing stifling of freedom of expression, persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, and imposition of rigid restrictions on social and cultural life all continue. And, of course, the Iranian regime is the foremost regional sponsor of repression, since it backs Al-Assad's brutal despotism in Syria. The Iranian people deserve better than a closed and airless society, isolated from the international community. Like all peoples, they aspire to the universal values of freedom and democracy. They deserve to live in a country that honours those universal human values, and to enjoy the same rights and freedoms that this Organization stands for.

(spoke in French)

Finally, Canada would like to take this opportunity to address the issue of Palestinian participation in this meeting and the fact that its representative is seated behind a nameplate that reads "State of Palestine". We fear that Palestine's participation in this meeting as the State of Palestine creates a misleading impression. On 29 November, in a statement to the General Assembly in the context of its adoption of resolution 67/19, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, the Honourable John Baird, clearly outlined Canada's position. It has not changed. It should also be emphasized that

resolution 67/19 did not confer statehood on Palestine any more than it constituted some kind of recognition of a Palestinian State.

Canada remains committed to the quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, whereby two States can live side by side in peace and security. We welcome attempts to encourage the parties to resume direct peace negotiations without delay or preconditions, in accordance with the Quartet's statement of 23 September 2011. We share the goal of a negotiated solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict that will allow two States to live side by side in peace and security.

In our view, allowing the Palestinians to participate under the name of the State of Palestine prejudices the outcome of the final status negotiations and makes a resumption of the peace talks more difficult. It raises expectations without changing the facts on the ground or improving living conditions, and risks giving the false impression that Palestine has achieved statehood. Canada will therefore continue to oppose any attempts by the Palestinians to appropriate a higher status than that which is recognized in the United Nations and other international organizations.

(spoke in English)

Clearly, from our perspective, the best path to achieving an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel is for both parties to re-engage in direct negotiations immediately.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Shaanika (Namibia): I am honoured to participate in today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would like to express our appreciation to Pakistan for convening the debate, and to Mr. Robert Serry, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his insightful and comprehensive briefing on the prevailing situation.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, but I would also like to add some comments that reflect our national position. Due to the time constraints, I will limit my comments to the situation in Palestine.

There is not a shred of doubt that the situation in the Middle East, particularly in the occupied territory of Palestine, continues to face numerous challenges and the test of time. This is due to a combination of many factors, such as the absence of any political will for pursuing the peace process and to continuing acts of provocation by the occupying Power. Namibia believes that for a negotiation process to succeed, it requires an impartial peace broker and committed and willing partners to carry it through to its logical conclusion. Currently, those factors appear to be entirely absent, and that vacuum is filled by negative activities.

Last year, on 29 November, the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to accord Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. My delegation supported and voted in favour of resolution 67/19 because we did not see it as an obstacle to the peace process; we thought it would enhance it and send a clear message that international patience was gradually wearing thin. That important gesture by the international community was greeted with peaceful celebrations in the occupied territories and with punishment for the people of Palestine by Israel, the occupying Power.

My delegation noted that following that important vote, Israel, with total disregard for international opinion, announced its intentions to proceed with plans for the settlement construction of more than 3,000 housing units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and, most alarmingly, indicated that planning would proceed on several thousand housing units in the E-1 area of East Jerusalem. The construction of illegal settlements and the apartheid wall of annexation will not enhance Israel's security, and they mutilate the State of Palestine, thus contributing to a hostile environment that will make the prospect of a two-State solution impossible to achieve. Such activities are also contrary to the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion of July 2004 and constitute grave breaches under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Similarly, we deplore the action of the Israeli Government in withholding Palestinian tax revenue as a punishment for Palestine's admission to the United Nations as a non-member observer State. The upgrading of Palestine's status by the General Assembly is a matter of legitimate aspiration for the people of Palestine and the decision of Member States in the exercise of their sovereign rights and free will.

Namibia shares the conviction that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is imperative for the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East. There is no substitute for negotiations to that end, but the process of negotiation cannot become open-ended. While we express our support for the resumption of the peace process, we caution that it should not be turned into a perpetual orbit with no destination. The overwhelming vote of the General Assembly last year underscored the urgent need to resume meaningful talks.

Genuine peace can come about only when parties to the conflict take bold steps to heal the bleeding wounds and usher in an era of hope and optimism. We have therefore come here today to express our support for the revival of the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the existing agreements between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Similarly, my delegation reaffirms the legitimate right and aspiration of the people of Palestine to their own independent State, and we hope that one day the Council will recommend its full membership of the United Nations.

My delegation wants to make one thing clear. Our position is not biased against Israel, but merely opposed to its actions. We have repeatedly acknowledged that Israel, like any other country on Earth, is duly entitled to adequate security. That ought to be recognized and acknowledged. However, the pursuit of security should not be a blatant excuse to violate the human rights of the people of Palestine. It is our firmly held conviction that the only way that Israel can guarantee its security is through the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State that would exist side by side with Israel, inside internationally recognized borders. It is only then that the leopard will be able to lie with the lamb and the calf will graze together with the lion cub.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to express my delegation's deep appreciation to the presidency of Pakistan for organizing this open debate, which is the third so far under your presidency.

It is reassuring and most gratifying that the Security Council's open debates, which address a number of subjects, have become customary. These debates provide an excellent opportunity for countries that, like mine, do not have the privilege of serving on the Council to participate, share views and make a contribution in our own small way to global discourse.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement that has been delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Since December 2010, the world community has witnessed a transformation of epic proportions ushered in by a revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests and legitimate struggle for freedom and economic emancipation as ordinary men, women and youth have asserted their political rights to bring about change throughout the Middle East.

The Arab Spring has sent a strong and clear message across the Middle East and beyond that even the most selfishly ardent of regimes can never perpetuate the status quo for any length of time against the will of the people. It is therefore ill advised for those who, in the eyes of their own citizens, have lost the legitimacy to govern to continue clinging to positions of leadership, unperturbed by the mass loss of lives and destruction of property that come with their insatiable appetite for power.

We are mindful of the fact that, even as we sit around this horseshoe table of the Norwegian Room, the people of Syria have had and continue to endure immeasurable hardship and violence, ironically visited upon them by those sworn to protect them and ensure the welfare of their State. The world has, regrettably, stood by helplessly as the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad brutally persecutes its own people. Since the beginning of the conflict 23 months ago, more than 60,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed. The number of the internally displaced and those fleeing the violent repression has more than doubled as more and more Syrians increasingly find the situation in their country unbearable.

It is for that reason that the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, consistent with its Charter responsibilities, need to assume a higher moral ground in preventing further massacres of innocent civilians in Syria. The Security Council has choices to make with regard to the question of Syria. The first choice is whether to continue with the current

business-as-usual approach, whereby some Members are preoccupied with the pursuit of strategic interests and priorities that are not exogenous to the suffering of the Syrian people. The second and most desirable choice is to desire and ensure for the Syrian people all that is enjoyed by the respective populations of all the protagonists, which is a livelihood that is not dictated by bombs, massacres and gun battles. For once, the images of frightened children amid collapsing walls and rubble should be replaced by the laughter and smiles of happy children with their families.

Botswana is among the 50-plus countries that have signed a letter supporting the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (S/2013/19, annex).

On a related issue, it is a matter of deep regret that, for generations now, the efforts of the international community to find a durable solution to the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, have been fruitless. Botswana has consistently expressed its position in various forums that there is merit in the two-State solution. We believe in the coexistence of Israel and Palestine, living side by side as two sovereign States that share not only a border, but a common desire for peace, security and prosperity.

In the interest of peace and the protection of innocent lives of civilians, and for future generations that will know no violence, the people of Middle East need to embrace the virtue of dialogue and reject the folly of violence. We therefore urge the parties to this conflict to summon the necessary will and courage to address all the hurdles that have so far prevented the achievement of a balanced outcome acceptable to all concerned.

It is also imperative that all the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions dealing with this particular issue be fully implemented and respected. That will go a long way in promoting basic humanitarian principles, international law and international humanitarian law, by all parties to the conflict.

Botswana fully supports the intensification of international diplomatic efforts aimed at creating an atmosphere conducive to furthering negotiations, the outcome of which should be mutual recognition and the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. To that effect, we wish to echo the call of the international community for

each of the parties to fulfil its obligations and act in accordance with the various international instruments, and to refrain from any steps that could undermine the momentum of the negotiating process.

In the same context, Botswana encourages both parties to shun violence and constructively engage in acts that support rather than undermine peace. It is for that reason that the State of Israel should heed calls to end its settlement activities in order to provide an impetus for the delicate process of remoulding a peaceful accord.

In conclusion, transformative change and accommodation in the Middle East should be the greatest reward for the children of the region who face constant confrontation and violence, in order that they too can live the peaceful and dignified lives that are experienced by their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Hamadi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your presidency of the Security Council this month and for the work that you are doing, particularly in convening today's meeting. I would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning. I welcome the presence of Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine.

Last year, we saw a historic turn when Palestine was granted the status of non-member observer State by the General Assembly, following the recognition of the State of Palestine by a majority of States in the world. Although that event was long delayed, it did take place, and in the right forum. However, that is still not enough. Consensus on finding a solution for the question of Palestine and for achieving peace in the Middle East through the two-State solution requires the recognition of Palestine as a full State Member of the United Nations. We therefore invite the Security Council to support those efforts.

Despite that international consensus, the Government of Israel has not expressed a sincere interest in the two-State solution or a genuine desire for peace based on it. The strongest proof of Israel's reaction to Palestine being granted observer State status was its stepping up its illegal settlement activities, causing

14 members of the Security Council to reject those measures, which clearly stand in the way of peace. Accordingly, we invite the Security Council to meet in order to explicitly condemn illegal Israeli settlements and to promote the peace process in accordance with instruments of international legitimacy and terms of reference, and to generate the political will likely to result in a just and lasting solution.

In addition to settlements, Israel is treating the issue of East Jerusalem in a way that does not serve the cause of peace. We would again insist that measures taken by the Israel to Judaize Al-Quds and suppress that holy city's Arab and Islamic identity are null and void and without legal effect. Al-Quds will remain an Arab, Islamic and Christian city with its mosques and churches. There will be no Palestinian State without Al-Quds and there will be no Al-Quds without the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Security Council must therefore adopt a decision or resolution that establishes an international committee to investigate unjust Israeli practices and all measures undertaken by Israel to eliminate the Arab Islamic identity of Al-Quds.

A number of Palestinian prisoners have highlighted their suffering by undertaking a hunger strike. We ask that an end be put to their suffering and that Israel be obliged to release them. We also call for the lifting of the economic siege and of the withholding of tax and customs revenues imposed on Palestinians and on the Palestinian Authority. Israel's unfair policies do not serve the cause of just and lasting peace in any way whatsoever. We hope that the new Israeli Government will adopt an approach that is in harmony with the peace process and in accordance with international law.

In that regard, we reiterate that the solution to the crisis in the Middle East depends on Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining Lebanese territory occupied by Israel, as well as an end to Tel Aviv's violations of Lebanese sovereignty. The State of Qatar is committed to supporting the brotherly Palestinian people in order that it may obtain its full inalienable rights.

The State of Qatar contributes to the relief efforts in Gaza through reconstruction efforts following the Israeli aggression. We note in that regard the visit to Gaza of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, who expressed the solidarity of the Government and the people of the

State of Qatar with the besieged Palestinian people. He undertook to contribute to the rebuilding of Gaza through a number of projects involving basic services, including schools and hospitals. The Security Council must convey a firm message to Israel to end the unjust siege and stop bombing civilians.

With regard to Syria, the Council was briefed last week by Ms. Navi Pillay and Ms. Valerie Amos with regard to human rights, emergency assistance and the need to provide aid to that brotherly country. I recall that early this year and for the first time in several months, the United Nations issued an estimated death toll in Syria, which has reached over 60,000, while the number of Syrian refugees could exceed 1,100,000 before the middle of the year. These figures do not even take into account the internally displaced or those who suffer food insecurity and lack fuel, energy and other basic services. They do indicate, however, that Syria is experiencing an urgent humanitarian disaster that requires an international intervention on the part of the United Nations and the international community.

The sole party responsible for the deterioration of the situation in Syria is the Syrian regime, which met the will of its people with heavy weapons. The international community, including the State of Qatar, has tried to support a peaceful solution to the crisis through the efforts of representatives like the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, in the hope that the Syrian regime would respond to his appeals and to the voice of reason. But at every turn it impedes those endeavours, choosing instead a bloody approach and a destructive security situation. Here, I am referring specifically to the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian regime, which described the Joint Special Representative as biased towards a conspiracy targeting Syria. That demonstrates that the Syrian regime is not at all ready to engage positively with the international community or the Syrian opposition.

The recent reports of the use of toxic substances by the regime in the area of Homs point to the use of chemical weapons, proving that the regime disregards the lives of its citizens. The regime has killed or injured hundreds of thousands of citizens, destroyed entire neighbourhoods and villages, schools and universities. It has attacked citizens who were buying bread. It has committed the worst possible crimes — the slaughter of women and children with knives, rape and the

desecration of places of worship and the looting of property.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to your delegation, Mr. President, for convening this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We welcome Mr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of the observer State of Palestine, to this meeting, and we also the Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing to the Council.

We would like to associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

My delegation welcomes this opportunity to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We believe that with sustained focus and enduring attention, the international community will find a just, peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict.

It is in this connection that we call for a halt to Israeli settlements. Palestinian land is taken for the construction of more Jewish settlements despite the opposition of the international community, including in the Security Council. A case in point is the planned construction of settlements in the so-called E-1 region of Palestine. The construction of the so-called separation wall, which has been declared an illegal act, is another case in point. Those and similar acts will only serve to threaten the viability of the two-State solution and impede the peace process and final status decisions.

Nigeria believes that the stalled peace process could be re-energized through direct negotiations between the parties. We urge the Quartet to spare no effort to create an enabling environment for those talks to thrive. We are mindful of the need for the presence of the political will, and we call upon both parties to come to the negotiating table without preconditions. The status quo must be altered and the State of Palestine must be created, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbour Israel, within boundaries recognized by the rest of the world, with its capital in East Jerusalem.

The situation in Gaza is cause for concern. The Israeli blockade of the Strip, which continues to incapacitate the economic and social life of the area,

has worsened the plight of the people, who struggle daily. That continued blockade, which leaves the most vulnerable of society, particularly women and children, in abject penury, remains a scar on the collective conscience of the international community. It violates humanitarian and human rights laws, as well as relevant United Nations resolutions and other conventions of which Israel is a signatory. We therefore call on Israel to fulfil all its obligations as specified in those conventions.

Nigeria believes that the two-State solution is the best option to resolve the protracted conflict in the Middle East. It not only recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist, but to exist in peace and security. We therefore echo the call of Mr. Serry for concerted action with a view to salvaging the two-State solution.

My delegation believes that there exists an opportunity for both Israel and Palestine to live side by side as independent sovereign entities and that both parties to the conflict need to show genuine commitment to the negotiation process. The right of Israel to exist should be recognized by Palestine, while Israel should withdraw to its pre-1967 border and should cede East Jerusalem to Palestine to serve as the capital of the Palestinian State. In light of that, on 29 November 2012 my delegation voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 67/19, according Palestine the status of a non-member observer State. We now look forward to the admission of Palestine as a fully fledged, independent and sovereign Member of the United Nations, as it rightly deserves. That is long overdue, and we hope that it will be realized this year.

With regard to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Nigeria desires to see a speedy and peaceful settlement of the crisis, driven by a national reconciliation process led by Syrians themselves. It is our view that while the Security Council seems deadlocked on the matter and does not seem to be inclined to move quickly on the crisis, all sides in the Syrian conflict should not use that fact as a convenient excuse to destroy their country and continue to inflict untold hardships on their helpless populace.

External involvement should assist rather than polarize the parties to the conflict and compound sentiments that are already extremely opposed to each other. We deplore the continued deterioration of the situation in Syria and observe with regret that the international community has failed to bring it to an

end by using the instruments of dialogue, mediation and conciliation. We believe that the international community, especially the United Nations, has the moral responsibility to ensure that the Syrian Government and the rebels cease all hostilities in the overall interests of the country and the region as a whole.

Peace must be allowed to return to Syria, and all sides to the conflict must adhere to the rule of law and exhibit basic decency and consideration for the suffering of their people. The international community should therefore help the parties come together and resolve their differences peacefully, like brothers and sisters. Let the people of Syria themselves resolve their differences, assisted only by impartial and well-meaning outside involvement.

The President: The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Mottaghi Nejad (Islamic Republic of Iran) (*spoke in French*): I know it is late and that we are all exhausted after the long debate in this Chamber today. Our debate was essentially on the developments in the Middle East. But I ask the Council to be bear with me for a few moments, so that I may respond to what the representative of Canada said regarding my country.

Canada has once again abused the Council by making completely impertinent accusations against my country during today's debate. In its speech, it referred in particular to our nuclear programme, which is essentially aimed at producing energy and electricity. It is regrettable that the representative of Canada forgot to say that Israel is the only country in our region that possesses nuclear weapons.

(*spoke in English*)

Turning to the allegations regarding human rights, I should say that, unfortunately, the countries claiming to be the bulwark of democracy and champions of human rights are suffering from political paranoia and manipulating human rights issues to achieve their politicized and biased goals, while, on the contrary, it is well documented by the international human rights monitoring bodies that their own records in this field are seriously tainted.

Canada is a prime example in that regard. The fact that human rights in Canada have been systematically denied to large parts of its population, irrespective of the political ideology of the different Governments and

political parties in power, is well known. From failing in the scope of its international obligations, to failing in a constitutional and legislative framework, to failing in equality and non-discrimination, the right to life, liberty and the security of persons, to failing minorities and indigenous persons — there seems to be no area where Canada has not disgraced itself before humanity

when it comes to upholding human rights. I think that that is enough for tonight.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7 05 p.m.